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No. 121
May 2005

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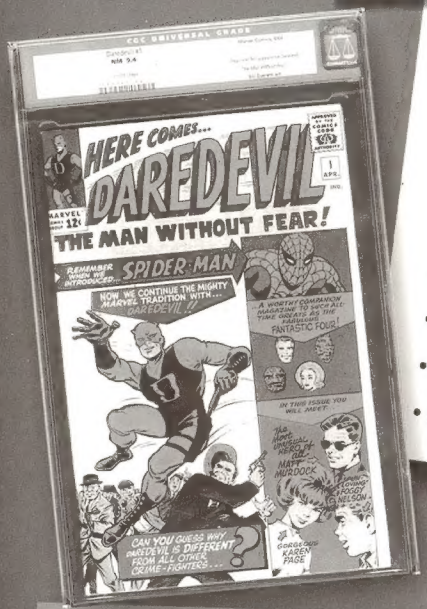
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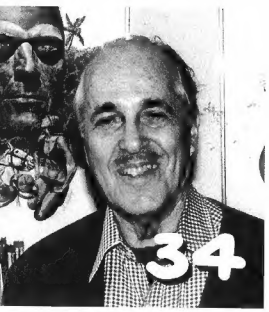

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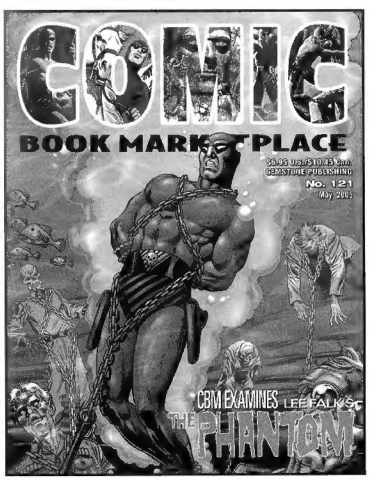

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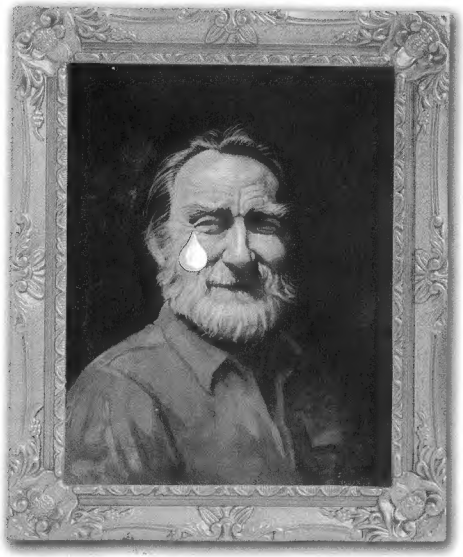

The End is Here

I've been putting off writing this column for several weeks now, wondering what I would say about the final issue of *Comic Book Marketplace*, and even now, as I sit here writing it, I don't know what I will say.

As a member of Steve Geppi's Diamond/Gemstone family, my work load as publisher of the EC comics in all their various formats had diminished, so when Gary Carter resigned as *CBM*'s editor, they threw the ball to me.

My first efforts, which started around issue #84, were hesitant, even faltering, as I tried to bring some of my own expertise in the area of newspaper comics and original art to the magazine, and I got a lot of letters from readers who wanted Gary to come back. Like in the movie *Shane*, when Brandon DeWilde runs after Alan Ladd at the end, shouting, "Come back, Shane!"...and then my mind zips to the next line as immortalized in an early *MAD*... "Here's another pop bottle!" But, like Shane, Gary wasn't coming back, so I had to try to give the *CBM* audience what they wanted.

So, I backed up a notch and started concentrating on Golden Age and Silver Age comic books, added a color section to the magazine, secured the services of Michael Kronenberg as a designer of the main articles, and the result is what you are holding in your hands right now. If you ask me, I would say that I was somewhat successful in bringing a new look to *CBM*, but sales did not increase and it continued to be a losing proposition, money-wise. It is a tribute to Steve Geppi that *CBM* continued to publish for several years despite the red ink on our financial statements. Steve wanted to keep *CBM* going as a service to collectors, until the phenomenal success of the e-zine *Scoop* convinced us all that using the Internet for instant communication of information which is of interest to comic collectors of all kinds was the wave of the future. And, for you, it's free!

So, there! I have used up my space! I, for one, will miss the printed version of *CBM* (I'm old-fashioned), but like millions of other comic fans I will be checking in with *Scoop* every week to catch all the latest news that we comic nuts like to hear. And how will I be using my time now?.... Some new and exciting projects are in the hopper, which you will be hearing about soon in *Scoop*. So as my grandmother Polly always said, this is "Au revoir" but not "Goodbye."

Russ

Russ Cochran
Editor & Publisher

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Hi there!

As much as I admire Michelle Nolan as a columnist and as much as I liked her article, "Funny Stuff, Indeed," in *CBM* #119, I was disappointed at not finding a single mention of the artist who drew all of the Dodo and the Frog stories. That was Otto Feuer, a former Fleischer/Famous Studios animator who drew funny animals for comic books from 1943-60. Besides D&F, he drew several other series for DC, including Fraidy Cat, Nip 'n' Chip and Peter Porkchops. He continued to animate while drawing comics, forming Animotion Associates in 1955 with another two animators/cartoonists, Rube Grossman and Graham Plaice. Born in Germany in 1907, Feuer concluded his animation career at Filmation in the mid-eighties. He died in 1998.

As for the writing, Woody Gelman penned a good deal of the D&F stories.

I think that even when an article is character-oriented (rather than author-oriented, which is the kind of piece I personally prefer writing) a few words, at least, should always be said about who did what. It's great to know about the D&F at the Alamo, but one should always keep in mind that these stories were created by people who deserve being mentioned for their contribution. At least, that's what I think.

Alberto Becattini
via e-mail

Well...shit. I mean, darn. Well I have been blessed to be a tiny part of *CBM* then and wish you luck and look forward to hearing about the new incarnation! Yours as always,

Pete Von Sholly
via e-mail

I'm very sorry to hear of *CBM*'s demise. I've really enjoyed working with you. The freedom to write on topics of interest to me, and your professionalism, has kept me excited and motivated. I'll miss it all.

Certainly the final issues of *CBM* are ones we can all be proud of, and I'm glad to be represented therein.

Perhaps other opportunities to get together will surface in the future. I hope so.

Will Murray
via e-mail

Very sorry to hear about the cancellation of *CBM*—it will be sorely missed.

Best wishes for the future

Paul Gravett
England

It's with profound sadness that I hear of the demise of *CBM*. This magazine has seen my progress as a writer, from those early letters to the editor, to that of a regular contributor. *CBM* will be greatly missed by the comic book world; however, I'm excited to hear of the possible re-emergence of the book in a new format.

Excelsior!!!
John R. Stuart

This is one of the hardest things I've ever had to write. In a very young year that's already seen the comics community lose its figurative and literal pillar, namely the late and great Mr. Will Eisner, the additional loss of this publication is another serious blow. And while I cannot help but have some feeling of personal and professional loss with the closing of the magazine, there's also a real, much larger sense that the world of comics at large has lost an increasingly rare and greatly underappreciated resource. After all, if we are all diminished by the death of one man or woman, as one poet suggested, then what disappears when a magazine that concentrates on the accomplishments of so many fine individuals goes the way of all flesh? I hear a din of stifled voices, and fear that many of their vital stories and involvement in events that helped

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establish and transform not only this art form we all love, but also, to a smaller extent, helped create and explain—perhaps even guide—the larger, real world we all mutually inhabit.

Still, I'm heartened by the news that some essence of *Comic Book Marketplace* will live on, albeit in some sort of merged, digital manifestation online. While the hard copy version of this paean to the vital legacy and efforts of generations of comics creators, fans and fellow travelers might have left this world, at least the Spirit lives on.

We can all take some comfort, and wisdom, from that lesson, I think.

Finally, I wanted to extend my thanks to Gemstone's JC Vaughn, who was kind enough to invite me to the party five years ago, to Russ Cochran, Angela Meyer, as well as the rest of the goodhearted folks at *CBM* central. Also, each and every one of the creators who spoke with me about their work, along with each and every reader of this magazine, past and present—you have my heartfelt and sincere gratitude. Without your time and energy and efforts, none of this would mean *anything*. Really.

I feel honored by my participation in this grand enterprise. It's been both a rare pleasure and a real privilege to have been allowed to contribute, in however small a way I might have done, to this fine magazine, the history of comics and your lives. All the best,

Bill Baker
comics journalist, frequent contributor
and Inspiration Central columnist
Host of Baker's Dozen at:
www.worldfamouscomics.com/bakersdozen
Home on the
web: www.bloodinthegutters.com,
beginning the summer of 2005

Ah, sad news about the demise of the print version of *CBM*. The last few color-filled issues, however, mean it's going out in glory, so to speak. I'll be looking forward to hearing what the online mag will be. Anyhow—it was a fun run while it lasted, Russ; and I'm glad I was aboard for some of it.

Warm best to you,

R.C. Harvey
Champaign, IL
RCHarvey@worldnet.att.net
And for bi-weekly Rants & Raves, chuck full of comics news and cartooning lore, beam up to **www.RCHarvey.com** where all my books are also described (as well as offered for sale, sez he with mercenary motive).

Much thanks for the beautiful layout on "Tuning in MAD" in #119, and the magical spread on Vadeboncoeur is quite awesome.

I am disappointed to learn of the finale of *CBM* if indeed this is true. You created quite a lavish production with *CBM* and showed up other publications as minor-league efforts.

Bhob Stewart
via e-mail

Sorry to hear *CBM* is no more. It was fun working for you. Keep me posted about what's happening with the online version as well. Thanks.

Steve Ringgenberg
via e-mail

I'm sorry to hear the bad news about *Comic Book Marketplace*. I liked the magazine a lot, and thought it was always a terrific read. I think it will be missed greatly by its fans. Best,

Dan Johnson
via e-mail

I just now got around to reading Scoop from 2/4 and the Main Event stinks!

I have read *CBM* faithfully since issue 16 which I happened across at a Walden's years ago. I stuck with Gary and then you as you guys figured out what your audiences wanted, and just as Gary really hit his stride, he dumped the book…and now that the past few (really, the last whole year!) issues with you as editor have become must reading, cover to cover, there goes the neighborhood again!

Just wanted to thank you and the folks at *CBM* for a great read for a long time. I love the letters, Michelle, the market reports, and the wonderful articles about so many books I never would have known about if not for *CBM*! Many of those articles have changed my collecting habits to such a degree that I'm not sure which things I collected pre-*CBM*/post-*CBM*! By the way, loved the robot feature by Will in the latest issue.

What I will miss most is a slick mag that really proves comic collecting/investing/adoration is not some stupid middle-aged nonsense like my wife would like to have everyone believe! Thanks for the vent!

C. Weed
via e-mail

I am sorry to learn that *CBM* will discontinue publication with issue #121. In my opinion, it is the best on the market. Its excellent quality is typical of all of your work over the past quarter century. I will miss it. Thanks for your excellent work.

Frank Nuessel
Louisville, KY

I am saddened to hear that *CBM* is coming to an end. I have been a faithful subscriber and would like to express my thanks for all of the hard work that you and your staff have put into publishing this fine journal.

Good luck with your future endeavors. Sincerely,

Christopher Frost
via e-mail

I was shocked to hear that *Comic Book Marketplace* is being discontinued. I think that *CBM* is one of the best sources of information about the history of Golden and Silver Age comics on the market. I also value the market updates that are contained in each issue and the

magnificent color printing of rare comics and related items. It would be a great loss to comics fandom if this magazine goes under and I would urge Gemstone to reconsider their decision. I would also ask that other readers in agreement with me write to Russ or to Gemstone and express their concern. There are extremely few magazines dealing with comics history in regular publication and we can't afford to lose another one, especially the best of the best.

On another note: I'm writing a history of Siegel and Shuster's career and the birth of the superhero, based on my interviews with them and other material. If any of your readers have any anecdotes, quotes, or rare art work I would very much like to hear from them. Thanks for your help.

Thomas Andrae
Berkeley, CA
andrae@california.com

I am truly saddened to see *CBM* cease publication. Under your stewardship the mag reached the highest level of quality. The writing, layout, color printing and graphic design was second to none!

I am proud to have had a few of my interviews published in *CBM*. My thanks to your friendly, personable staff and for your longtime friendship. You and Bruce Hamilton were very early contributors to my San Diego Comic-Con as dealers and for bringing the late, great Carl Barks to the con. Lots of great memories.

My thanks also to Steve Geppi for caring enough to fund such a beautiful magazine. I hope in future there will be perhaps a quarterly version. You raised the level of respect for this wonderful medium we have such fondness for and for everyone who has worked in comics and never got the proper respect.
Sincerely,

Shel Dorf
San Diego, CA

It was with great sadness that I read the letter about the ending of *Comic Book Marketplace*. I will truly miss it. I know that it was a difficult decision to make, but because of low circulation, it had to be made.

CBM was one of the main reasons that I got back into collecting. Through it and some other people, I went to San Diego for the first time (about ten years ago) to meet some of the people that were writing for *CBM*. It meant a lot to meet and see those people and be at the convention. That also led to meeting such people as Chris Pedrin, Gary Carter, Mick Rabin, Michael Naiman, the Big Five collectors, and many other great collectors and overall fun people. It's been like riding a roller coaster.

Since it became a slick publication, I have read it studiously. Every issue had something in it that I truly enjoyed. It was easy to see that everyone who contributed really felt deeply about what the comics meant to them and those who created comics. It was a labor of love.

Unfortunately, all good things come to an end. I'm sure that you'll have many people wanting to express themselves in the final issue (I want to be there, too) and sing the praises for what you and Gary Carter did. My thanks to both of you and the many people who contributed to *CBM* over the years (I'm glad that I got to be among them).

I will cherish my copies of those wondrous issues. Truly one-of-a-kind.

Goodbye to an old friend.

Steven Fears
via e-mail

I am terribly sorry that *CBM* is coming to the end of its road. It was, I realize, inevitable. The magazine reflected a collector mentality that is not shared by the current generation of fans and speculators. Publicity and improved product can only attract new readers if an audience exists. I don't think this one does.

I have every issue, and cherish them all. Michelle Nolan has become a monthly must; other contributors, like Pat Calhoun and Michael Naiman, both educate and entertain. Of course I'll read them on line. What will be saddest about the loss of hard copies of their work is that their articles will not be saved in well laid-out and beautifully illustrated form in my library.

Future fans will look back and gasp that there once were a couple of magazines with such high production values and deep research. We have lived through what is for collectors a golden age, with most of the great work in the field available in quality reprints simultaneously. You have played such a large part in this that none of us will ever be able to thank you enough. My lasting gratitude goes to you and the Carters, who played such a wonderful part in our hobby. Thank you to everyone who gave us *Comic Book Marketplace*. Best wishes,

Paul Gambaccini
England

I just came across your letter dated January 25, 2005 which came with issue #119; I didn't realize it was there until I attempted to put that issue back in the folder today.

It's very difficult to explain how I feel about your having to discontinue publishing *CBM* with issue #121. I always looked forward to receiving it each month and the day it arrived I opened the envelope immediately, removed the magazine, set it aside after scanning the articles and color section, and planned to read it as time permitted. I have just finished reading issue #119 which beautifully covered old time radio heroes of whom I have many, many fond memories. Thank you.

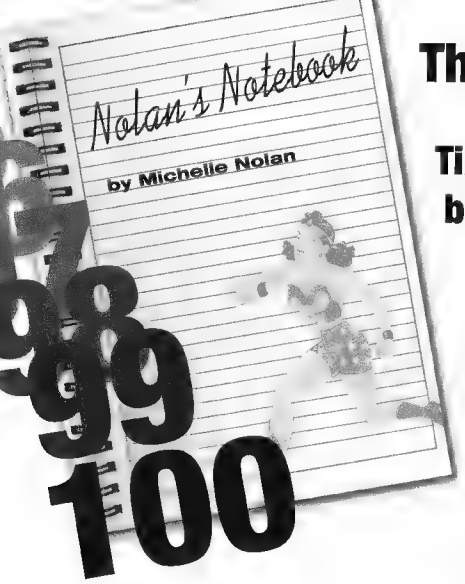
Your letter prompted me to check to determine when my last renewal was made, not because I would seek a refund, but because I couldn't do with missing out on issues #120 and 121.

Again, I can't tell you how much it hurts to know *CBM* has come to an end. I will miss it!

John Schreiber
Kingston NH

I'm very sorry *Comic Book Marketplace* is ending. It has been my favorite comic-related magazine for all these years. You have done a superb job.

[continued on page 81]



The Notebook Turns 100!

Time and comic book heroes, it seems, both fly when you're having fun

It really is difficult to believe this is the 100th consecutive issue for Nolan's Notebook since the column first appeared ten years ago. The Notebook debuted in *CBM* #22 (Mar 1995). That issue marked the return of "the magazine for advanced collectors" following a hiatus.

Of course, it's also hard to realize that I've been collecting comics for 49 years. One hesitates to say nearly half a century!

When *CBM* editor Russ Cochran was kind enough to inquire what I wanted to do to celebrate, I suggested that I would like to mention 100 favorite characters and/or titles, be they runs or single issues. For the most part, I'm going to avoid the genuinely iconic—Superman, Spider-Man, Wonder Woman and the like—in favor of comics you may not be as familiar with.

If you've followed Nolan's Notebook for any time, though, you've already read about many of these comics. Having penned more than 200,000 words in the Notebook—egad!—what I've always tried to do is to write about topics you may not know much about, though might find fun to explore. My goal has always been the same—to reflect a sense of wonder and pop culture "scholarship" involved in collecting and exploring old funny books.

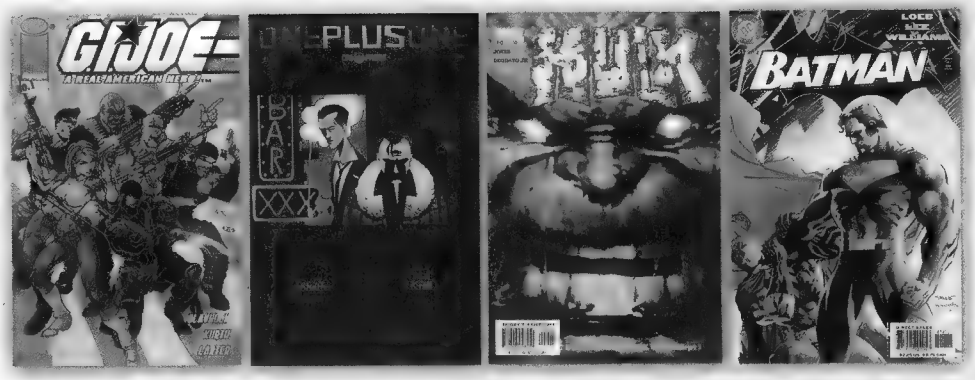
I feel extremely fortunate that the nostalgia lovers who lead Gemstone Publishing, Steve Geppi and John Snyder, have been kind enough to allow me to spout on at such length. What can I say, guys, but thanks! I'm also indebted to Russ Cochran and former editor Gary Carter, along with everyone else at *CBM*, plus the multitude of fans who have suggested ideas to me. The only way I can ever repay your kindness is to keep writing! It's truly touching to have fans tell me at shows how much they enjoy the column.

When I was young, in the 1950s and '60s, I thought the Golden Age had lasted a long, long time. Now it's mind-boggling to realize that "Nolan's Notebook" has appeared longer than the original titles starring characters such as Green Lantern, The Flash, Captain America, Black Terror, Mary Marvel and so many other Golden Age favorites. Just imagine—the first book to popularize old comic books, *The Great Comic Book Heroes* by Jules Feiffer, appeared 40 years ago! At that time, the characters in that seminal volume were only 24 to 27 years old.

Time plays tricks on the mind, though, doesn't it? Somehow, Golden Age characters and comics seem closer in time to me today than they did way back when. Do you feel that way, too? Maybe it's just a matter of familiarity. Perhaps it's just what happens when one attends more than 200 conventions and shows of various types over a 40-year span.

Well, enough nostalgic babbling! Here are 100 of my favorites. The list isn't definitive, nor is it necessarily all-inclusive. I've probably left several comics off that I might well include at another time. Nor is the list in any particular order, except that I've grouped the list pretty much by publisher. I'll start with my favorite company as it was known by the classic circles on the covers when I first began reading comics, "Superman DC National Comics."

Green Lantern—Always my favorite Golden Age character along with Flash Gordon and Wonder Woman, the Emerald Crusader's late 1940s appearances in *Green Lantern*, *All-American*, *Comic Cavalcade* and *All Star* are among the finest examples



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of imaginative storytelling and art. I especially love the work by Alex Toth and Irwin Hasen. "In brightest day, in blackest night, no evil shall escape my sight; let those who worship evil's might, beware my power—Green Lantern's light!"

All Star #57 (Feb-Mar 1951)—The Justice Society's ironically named last Golden Age appearance, "Mystery of the Vanishing Detectives," was my first exposure to the JSA when I discovered an old copy for a nickel at a second-hand bookstore at age ten. There were better adventures of the JSA, but this will always be my favorite, both for story and art. Many collectors consider this the last true Golden Age comic—I consider it perhaps the peak of the form.

Sugar and Spike—Writer/artist Sheldon Mayer's 98-issue series from 1956-71 is as good as it gets when it comes to combining the touching and amusing. These are absolutely the most under-rated comic books of all time!

Space Cabbie in 1950s issues of *Mystery in Space*—The innocent sense of galactic wonder of this series still leaves

me in awe. Maybe I'm sentimental because Space Cabbie was the first continuing character I was exposed to in the first comic book I ever bought—*Mystery In Space* #32 in 1956—but I just love these stories.

Viking Prince in *Brave & The Bold* #1-24—Joe Kubert's interpretation was an absolute masterpiece of comic book adventure. Simply awe-inspiring.

Big Town—The 50 issues of this 1950s title about a fighting newspaper editor are the centerpiece of my collection of more than 1,000 books, magazines and comics about fictional journalists. As a newspaper writer for nearly 40 years, I treasure this series.

Mademoiselle Marie in *Star Spangled War Stories* #84-89—There has never been a braver heroine in comics history. The covers are knockouts!

Mutt and Jeff, especially the 1940s issues—These are laugh-out-loud newspaper strip reprints (at least I think they're all reprints). What a concept, what marvelous Americana about two nutcases.

Flippity & Flop—Tweety & Sylvester define the cat-and-canary genre, but the Flippity & Flop epics in several titles are so funny I can never stop laughing.

The Fox & The Crow and The Dodo and The Frog—The originality of these characters makes their tales just as funny today as they were 50 or 60 years ago.

Robin Hood Tales—There were several comic book versions of Robin Hood, but my favorites are the imaginative DC issues (#7-14, continued from the Quality Comics series). Robin Hood is a character I have loved since my first exposure to him.

Scribbly—Shelton Mayer's 15 issues from 1948-52 are masterpieces of offbeat teen humor and daydreams. At least one issue should be in every collection of those who appreciate graphic genius.

Johnny Thunder in *All-American* and later *All Star Western* from 1948-61—My favorite comic book cowboy. There are no badly written or drawn Johnny Thunder stories—each is a masterpiece of improbable adventure.

Rex the Wonder Dog—The 46 issues from 1952-59 are wonderful examples of creative storytelling, and many of them have Carmine Infantino's fabulous Detective Chimp as well. If you love dogs, as I do, this imaginative series will be one of your pet favorites. This is also a very difficult series to put together. It took me more than 20 years in pre-Internet days.

Sensation Comics #94-106—These are the all-girl issues from 1949-51, including one of my favorite DC heroines, the futuristic telecaster Astra in #99-106. Every single issue is DC close to its finest during its best period.

The Ghost-Breaker in *Star Spangled* #122-130—DC never really published horror comics, but they sure had a lot of fun skirting the supernatural. These stories actually took a great deal more imagination than horror comics with "real" ghosts and ghouls.

Uncle Scrooge #15 with "The Second-Richest Duck"—This 1956 issue with a full-length story by Carl Barks was my first exposure to my favorite humor strip and my favorite humor artist. To say the introduction of Flintheart Glomgold was a masterpiece is an understatement. If you've never read this story, you have missed a tale that can be read on so many levels.

Walt Disney's Comics & Stories #146—This 1952 Donald Duck ten-pager by Barks, about the misadventures of Donald and his nephews as egg ranchers, is merely the funniest story I have ever experienced in any medium. I have read this story dozens of times over nearly half a century, and I still break out into laughter every time.

The Junior Woodchucks—The Barks versions of Huey, Dewey and Louie and the Junior Woodchucks are as captivating as they come when you're talking truth-revealing satires on kids. When I was a kid, I actually thought the Junior Woodchuck Manual was real! I guess I just wished it existed. The book of all wisdom, indeed!

Donald Duck Four-Color #367—"A

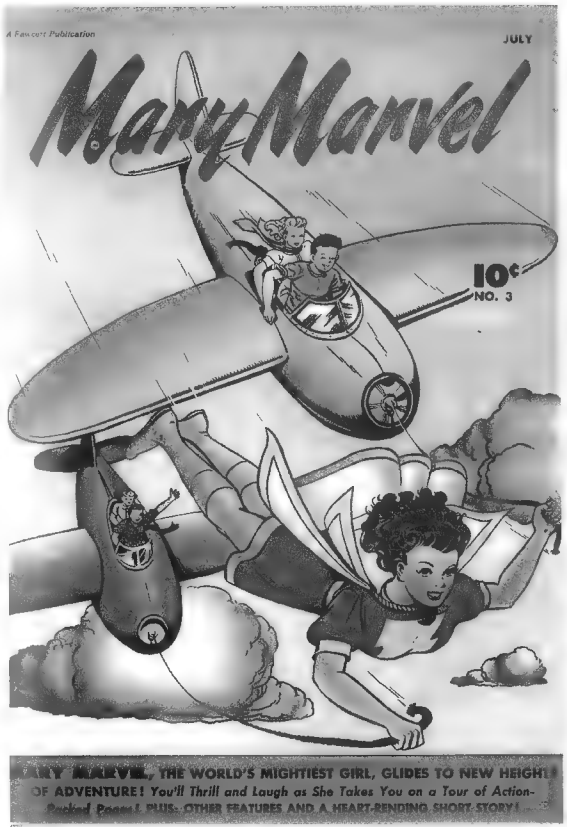
Christmas for Shacktown" ranks with the two tales above as my three favorite Disney epics. The human meaning of Christmas has never been reflected better in any story, any time, anywhere.

Tweety & Sylvester—The original 38-issue run from Dell is always good for a laugh. Well worth collecting for sheer fun. Tweety cartoons were my favorites in the 1950s.

Huey, Dewey and Louie Back to School—The four Dell Giants pretty much exemplify the joys and frustrations of school life in the 1950s. I loved these comics, even if their appearances did herald the return of school days.

Sergeant Preston of the Yukon—One of my favorite TV and radio shows as a child, "On King!" was always the call to great adventure. A vastly under-rated character in the annals of pop culture.

King of the Royal Mounted—The best of the Royal Mounted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comic strips emerged as a captivating comic book series, with covers to conjure with, if you love the legend of the Canadian Mounties as much as I do.

Mary Marvel—The 28 issues of her own run (1945-48) are a tough set to put together. She also appeared regularly in *Wow Comics* and *Marvel Family*. A delightful blend of whimsy and heroics.

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Captain Marvel #85—This book-length novel from 1948 involving the Freedom Train is one of my favorite comics. It's wonderful Americana and Captain Marvel/Billy Batson at their best.

Master Comics #34—Captain Marvel Junior's foe, Captain Nazi, flies for the first time in this 1942 issue, one of the best of all World War II comics. It's tough to find, but Mac Raboy's art and his knockout cover makes this well worth the hunt.

Spy Smasher #4—"Remember Pearl Harbor" is the theme and it was never done better. A truly memorable cover and story. This was one of my father's favorite comics in my collection since he was an officer in the U.S. Navy and a Pearl Harbor survivor.

Fawcett baseball—Over the 1949-52 period, Fawcett produced several of the best baseball comics of all. They are fabulous period pieces. Much to the company's credit, many of the issues dealt with the emergence of black stars who broke Major League Baseball's color barrier, beginning with Jackie Robinson in 1947. Fawcett's six-issue run of Jackie Robinson is eminently collectible.

Fawcett *Movie Comics* and *Motion Picture Comics*—These 35 comics, mostly adapting classic Republic B Westerns and other adventure stories, were the first commercially successful adaptations of movies. Fortunately, most of them are neither rare nor expensive, just a lot of fun.

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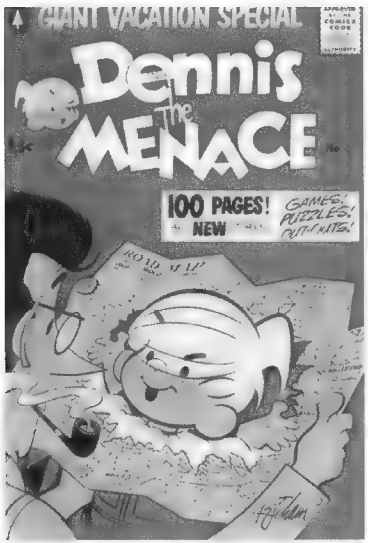
Adventures Into the Unknown #1-33—I'm fond of all the ACG weird titles, both pre- and post-Comics Code, but these 52-page gems from 1948-52 are classic examples of a genre I call "boy and girl meet and defeat ghost/ghoul/vampire/zombie." *AITU* was the first regularly published horror comic, but its stories relied on mental stimulation rather than gore to make the experience fun.

Dizzy Dames—I recently profiled this six-issue series from 1952-53 as the ultimate in non-politically correct characters.

Hooded Horseman #21-27 (1952-54) and #18-22 (1955-56). There were 12 issues in all, plus a few earlier issues of the character in *Blazing West* until that title



became *Hooded Horseman*. I'm fond of masked western heroes and Hooded Horseman is one of the best, kind of an offbeat version of the Lone Ranger.

Blondie and Dagwood Feature Books—There were 12 full-color issues in all, ranging from #27 to #45 from 1942-45. I've always loved anything with Blondie and Dagwood, but these often patriotic Sunday page reprints are especially collectable pieces of Americana.

Dennis the Menace Giants—The first nine issues, which appeared from 1955-59 with just a bit of numbering confusion, are classic examples of early Dennis. No collection is complete without a couple of Dennis giants, all of which had themes. I especially love the Christmas issues. Even Mr. Wilson would agree.

Archie Annuals—Some of my fondest childhood memories are of spotting a new 25-cent Archie annual on the racks and realizing I was in for plenty of fun. I always thought they were fabulous bargains. Collectors tend to enjoy the Archie annuals from the years they were growing up. My favorites are *Archie Annual* #1-11 (1949-59), *Jughead* #1-8 (1953-60), *Betty & Veronica* #1-8 (1953-60) and *Archie's Pals 'N Gals* #1-11 (1953-59), plus…

Archie's Christmas Stocking #1-6—I'm giving this 1954-59 series of giants a special entry because they're my favorites of all the Archie annuals. Maybe it's just the memories of reading and re-reading them on Christmas vacations!

Little Archie—I vividly remember buying the first issue of Bob Bolling's wonderful title, which began in 1956. Bolling brilliantly did for the Archie "kids" what Carl Barks did for the Disney Ducks. If you've never tried Little Archie, you're missing a laugh-loaded treasure!

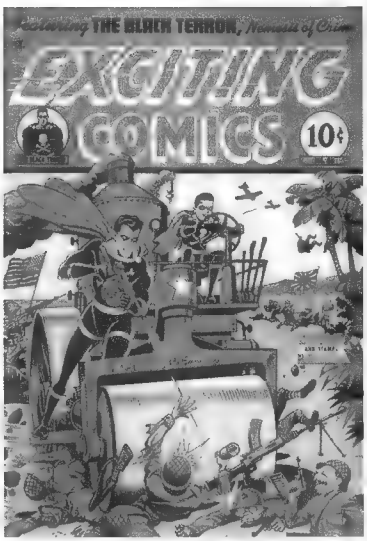
Jughead's Folly—This 1957 one-shot, inspired by the Elvis Presley craze, is well worthy of being reprinted. It's hard to find and expensive, but it's a fabulous parody of the period.

Cosmo the Merry Martian—Bob White's six-issue series was published in 1958-59, doubtless to take advantage of the public's fascination with the satellites. Seldom has anything funnier appeared in comic books.

The Double Life of Private Strong—One of the biggest disappointments of my childhood collecting days was waiting for #3. It never showed up, but Archie's two-issue attempt in 1959 to revive The Shield fascinated me, especially since I had never heard of The Original Shield and had not seen too many patriotic heroes. I guess the title killed the comic. I never could figure out how the much inferior Fly survived but The Shield didn't.

Katy Keene—Any Katy Keene title from her heyday in 1950-61 is well worth collecting, but you have to be especially careful to watch for cut up and torn out pages. If you enjoy vintage fashions, this is the comic book for you. I try to buy two or three back issues every year just for the sheer fun of it! You can't go wrong on any Katy Keene comic.

The Black Terror—Nedor, also known as Standard Comics and Better Publications, was the ultimate generic comic book company during the Golden Age. Nedor was part of Ned Pines' Thrilling Group, one of the leading pulp publishers. The Black Terror, who appeared in 27 issues of his own title along with



Exciting #9-69 and the 31-issue run of *America's Best*, surely had the best costume of all the Nedor heroes, yet often much of the worst interior art.

Alex Schomburg's covers for Nedor—

Schomburg worked for several other companies, most notably Timely, but his stunningly detailed Nedor work in the 1940s was often truly over the top. He was one of the few cover artists whose work alone was both wild enough and good enough to sell the comic, both on the newsstands and much later to collectors. Have you ever noticed how long you can stare at a Schomburg cover?

Exciting #39—Schomburg's 1945 portrayal of The Black Terror and Tim foiling Nazis who are injecting poison into candy and giving it to children is the ultimate World War II cover.

Jetta of the 21st Century—In 1952-53, Standard comics gave Dan DeCarlo a three-issue run (#5-7) with a futuristic version of Archie and his gang. The result is enough to make anyone wish the series had lasted much longer. Wonderful, wonderful DeCarlo. I'll always remember his smile when I was fortunate enough to get the chance to tell him how much I loved it.

Ozark Ike #11-25—Standard's amusing comic book version (1948-52) of Ray Gotto's classic sports parody in the newspapers is a real winner. If you like sports at all—and maybe even if you don't—you owe it to yourself to try one of these.

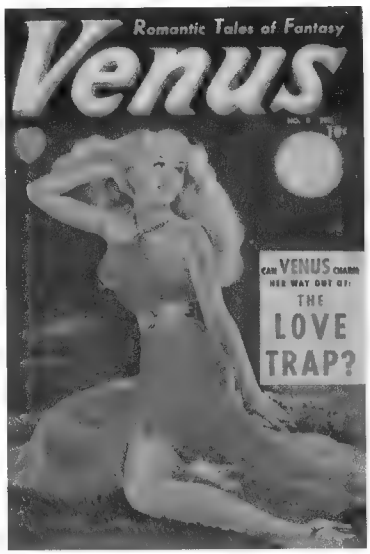
Blackhawk—After the Justice Society of America disappeared in 1951, the Blackhawks were the only regularly published heroic team in comic books throughout most of the 1950s (I'm not counting the three-member Marvel Family). They were at their best battling either exotic temptresses or bizarre machines of menace.

Buccaneers –The nine issues from Quality in 1950-51 (#19-28) are among the most flamboyant adventure comic books of all time, especially the stories drawn by Reed Crandall. They apparently didn't sell well, though. Any one of these would be among the best booty you could find at a convention.

Ken Shannon—There were plenty of crime comic books, but not many could boast hard-boiled heroes in the pulp manner. Ken Shannon, who appeared in ten issues of his own title and as the garish cover feature in *Police Comics* #103-127 in the early 1950s, was perhaps the most colorful of the private eyes. Great covers, great stories.

Crack Western—What Buccaneers did for pirates, *Crack Western* did almost as well for cowboys in 1949-53. There were 22 issues (#63-84) in Quality's only attempt as a western.

Dollman #37-47—It's hard to explain why a character as odd as tiny Dollman became one of the last survivors of the Golden Age. The final 11 issues (1952-53), most of which had horror themes, featured the team of Dollman and Dollgirl and boasted some of the most unusual covers of the period.



Jeb Rivers in *Hit* #61-65—Has there ever been another series set on a riverboat? Reed Crandall did inspiring work on these, and the stories were among the most unusual in the comics of 1949-50. It's too bad this series was one of the many victims of the Quality "implosion" during the second half of 1950.

Torchy #1-6 and in *Modern Comics* #53-102—Some of the most politically incorrect fun in the history of comics. Twiggy on steroids!

Young Men #24—When DC updated revivals such as Flash, Green Lantern and Hawkman, not many readers or collectors realized Stan Lee had beaten them to the idea by reviving Captain America and Bucky, Sub-Mariner and Human Torch in this December 1953 issue. But Subby lasted only two years and the others less than one year. Most collectors weren't even aware of their brief revival until the 1960s.

Black Rider—One of the best of the masked western knockoffs of The Lone Ranger. Characters like Black Rider bridged the costume hero gap between the Golden and Silver Ages. At one time, more than a dozen masked western heroes became riders of the purple page in the pre-Code 1950s.

Venus—Marvel's 19-issue run (1948-52) probably set a record for most genres in a four-year span—romance, slapstick, mythology, super heroine, science fiction, horror and who knows what else. I remember finding *Venus* #9 as a child, one of the romantic mythology issues, and wondering why it was so incredibly different from anything on the stands in 1958.

Casey Crime Photographer—George Harmon Coxe's pulp/radio photojournalist Flashgun Casey from *Black Mask* was among the few pulp heroes to make it into comic books, albeit briefly with #1-4 (1949-50).

Lorna the Jungle Girl and Jann of the Jungle—Lorna's 26-issue-run and Jann's 17 issues (including *Jungle Tales* #1-7) in the mid-1950s ostensibly appeared to take advantage of the popularity of Sheena, Tiger Girl, Nyoka and the like. It's a credit to their excellence that they lasted as long as they did, since jungle themes in comics were on the way out.

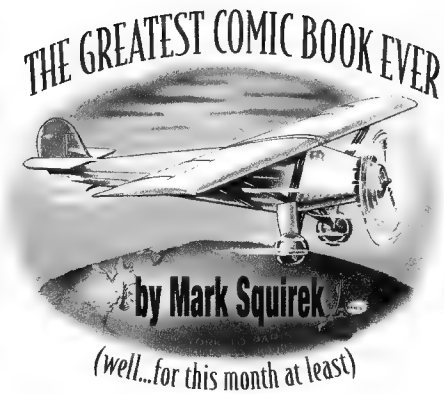
Miss America #1-2—The first two issues, both with 1944 dates, featured multiple stories of one of the most colorful of the patriotic heroes. Patsy Walker, who actually appeared in more stories than Archie's Girls Betty and Veronica through the 1945-54 period, debuted in #2.

My Girl Pearl—The ultimate dumb blond comic book. Even though I've absorbed more than my share of dumb blonde jokes, I still have to laugh every time I read one of these 1955-61 Marvel gems. Stan Lee and Dan DeCarlo really seemed to have fun with these.

Meet Miss Bliss—Marvel's four issues of this 1955 series were creative knockoffs of the *Our Miss Brooks* television series. One of the best of the comic books set in a school.

Sherry the Showgirl and *Showgirls*—*Sherry* ran six issues (#1-3, 5-7) and

[continued on page 92]



Time for a Classic Hero

"Rip Hunter Time Master" #24

by Mark Squirek

Even at a very young age, time travel fascinated me. You can blame H. G. Wells, comics and a very responsible librarian for that. To be able to go into the past and see what actually happened during an event, clean up mistakes (maybe prevent them from happening in the first place), or to become a hero by preventing someone from getting shot (think Lincoln or Archduke Franz Ferdinand before he became a rock band), has always made time travel the most intriguing concept in science fiction.

Funnily enough, I never harbored a desire to go into the future. The past was always the place to be. The wiring of my brain tells me that the future will take care of itself. Besides, since the future has yet to exist, there is no place to actually travel to anyway. This peculiarity is just the way my synapses fire when my own personal logic of science fiction comes into the picture.

The past is a completely different story. It has a dimensionality that I easily understood. It has existed. By virtue of it having once existed, it still exists. So therefore, you have an actual destination. There is someplace to go.

Travel to the past should be no different than driving to K-Mart.

This is why I loved the Silver Age Rip Hunter. He went places and I could always identify with wherever he went. It didn't matter if he was battling cavemen, pirates, or talking to Cleopatra, I understood where he was.

The character arrived very early in my formative comic years, but, over time, I was able to do some back-pedaling to find a lot of the older issues. These were hard to find. Not many people were buying *Rip Hunter* off of the newsstands. It was a lot easier to find *Green Lantern* or *Batman*, but issues of *Rip Hunter* proved elusive. The first time I read one of his adventures had to be around 1965.

The issue that I found was almost certainly sitting in a barbershop. Finding *Rip Hunter Time Master* #24 happened about three weeks before my Mother, who felt that she could learn to do anything, started to cut her children's hair.

When I was younger, going to the barbershop was a great trip and something I looked forward to. There were always comics on his waiting table and a piece of candy to be pulled from a jar when the haircut was over. The comics were usually an odd mix of *Casper*s and *Hot Stuff*s. If I was lucky, he had a few *Superboy*s, or *Batman*s. One of the nicest parts about the visit was that he never seemed to mind if I took a couple of them home. They were always returned. Back then, I was a lot more concerned with my credit rating than I would be in my twenties.

At this early point in my evolution, comics were still very brand new to me. From the great looking house ads that DC ran I had become aware of other comics that they published. But at this point I had only run into a couple of other heroes other than Superman or Batman. They were the JLA, Green Lantern and Flash. I did know that the DC logo on the cover of any book I saw meant that I would probably like the book.

There was no way for me to get my hands on comics at this time except for the generosity of others. My Grandma had helped out once or twice, and so had my Dad. But in every instance, it was made very clear to me that a comic was something special and not meant to replace my homework or regular reading. It was the regular reading that needed to be a priority.

Historically, few parents actually approved of comics. My father was, and is, a Shakespeare nut. He loves the Bard so much that he regularly read the Mary and Charles Lamb versions to his children. His love of Shakespeare would manifest itself in dogs named Cressida and Jessica (*Merchant of Venice*), among other things and a thousand Shakespeare jokes at his expense. If Shakespeare just wrote some comics, I was sure that he would let me read more of them.

When I saw the cover to *Rip Hunter* #24 sitting there under a pile of Harveys on the table at the barbershop, it popped right out at me. I was developing a sixth sense for finding the DC logo in piles of comics. The purple on the background of the cover had also made it stick out.

I immediately thought that the story had something to do with Shakespeare. Most of the characters appeared to be dressed like people I had seen in a Shakespeare book. The woman was also a queen. Lots of Shakespeare's plays seemed to have queens in them. When I opened to the first page, one of the characters chasing Rip said "forsooth," so I knew that I had a winner on my hands. Here was a comic that my Father would definitely approve of.

My haircut came and went quickly. A couple of comics also left with me that day. I started to read *Rip Hunter* on the ride home, but I couldn't figure out exactly what was going on. I sat in the back of the truck, bouncing from the ride, unable to concentrate. The words "Time Master" in the title sounded like a book I had just read. This had really sparked my imagination and I wanted to get somewhere quiet to make sure I could absorb everything written inside.

Once home, I ran behind the garage and read it as quick as I could. It took me a minute or two to adjust to the book. It didn't really look like the other DC books I had encountered. The art seemed to be a bit more complicated. The faces of the characters in the book seemed to be more out of a movie than an issue of *Jimmy Olsen* or *Superboy*. The book also seemed to actually be about a team of people instead of just Rip Hunter. He was in charge, but they were a team.

At first I thought that the book took place in the past because it opens with a fight between pirates. It turns out that the pirates were really just people making a movie. The people making the movie want Rip Hunter to take them into the past so they can authenticate the picture they are making.

I suddenly realized that the character was going to be traveling to the past in a machine. This blew my mind. It was exactly like something that I had just read by H.G. Wells. A week before finding this *Rip Hunter*, I had read *The Time Machine* for the first time. The book was suggested to me by the librarian at school. I was always asking her why the school library didn't carry comic books. She felt that some Wells might get my mind off of comic books and also get me off of her back.

Her suggestion helped create the first great literary obsession in my life. Until Sherlock Holmes came along a year or two later to replace him, I tried to read everything by H.G. Wells and then Jules Verne. As great as many of the Wells books were, *The Time Machine* may be the very first book that ever captured my brain and made it think on its own. There was whole world outside of the town I lived in and Wells had made several parts of it very real to me.

Now, here in my hands, was a comic book that talked about the same subject that Wells had written about in such great detail, time travel. The story went by quickly and I reread it several times over the next couple of weeks. This was a book that I immediately loved. When I showed it to my Father, he was a bit dismissive, but he handed it back to me with a smile and told me that I should read some real history.

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Finding more issues of *Rip Hunter* to read proved to be difficult. It seems no one else had heard of him. Lots of people I knew had western comics and Superman comics and Batmans, but no one cared about a man who could travel through time. Several of the other kids told me it was a stupid power and that anyone could build a time machine if they wanted. One of those kids now owns a MacDonald's. Another one writes code for the Government. As far as I know, they have yet to build a time machine.

I remember seeing Rip Hunter in some DC house ads, but I couldn't really remember where. Once my Mom had bought a pair of scissors, finding another Rip Hunter at the barbershop was not a reality.

The months went by and the fever for Rip Hunter was replaced by, among other things, more Wells, some Verne, and the Justice League of America. This fascinating book was relegated to a box in the corner of my room. Occasionally I would see the title advertised in a DC book, but he eventually faded from my mind.

Over the course of the next few years, issues of *Rip Hunter* started to turn up. They were always down at the bottom of boxes, or in the back of shelves of the stores I was discovering. Eventually I had found about fifteen issues. Each one was as interesting to me as the last one. The stories started to seem a bit redundant, but they were always interesting and the people on the team seemed a bit more human than other people in the DC books I read.

As the back issues accumulated, I noticed that Rip had seldom traveled into the future. The two issue of *Showcase* I

CLASH
OH-H-H-H!
YEOW!
YIPES!
WHOOSH
HOLD EVERYTHING, SIR WALTER--I WANNA GET MY SWORD BACK!
YOU WON'T NEED A SWORD WHERE YOU'RE GOING!
NO, NO--I'M TOO YOUNG TO DIE! AND--AND WHAT ABOUT MY MOVIE CAREER--?

had found (#25 and #26), place Rip back with a magician in 960 AD and then in ancient Egypt. This made sense to my ten or eleven year old brain. It was at this point in my life that I formulated the ideas about time travel that opened this piece. This concept has stayed with me ever since.

That first issue I had found, #24, was written by George Kashdan and drawn by Bill Ely. By the time they started working on Rip Hunter; both were long time comic veterans. Kashdan was an established editor at DC who was also handling *The Brave and the Bold* among other titles. He would occasionally write a story for the books that he edited.

Ely had worked on books for Fiction House, Ziff-Davis, Eastern Color and Hillman among others. Some of his best known work was on *Ellery Queen*, *Ripley's Believe it or Not* and *Zorro*. When you see an issue of *Rip* from the time that Ely was drawing the book, you can easily see how he was able to take what he learned on a one-panel like *Ripley* and apply it to sequential comics. He was also occasionally drawing the Atom around this time, but it was his run on *Hunter* that provided him with his most exposure at DC. Despite some very big heavyweights who worked on *Rip Hunter* during his earliest appearances, it is Ely's run on the title that most fans associate with Rip Hunter.

The early days of Rip Hunter are actually very interesting. Those first appearances were handled by several artists who went on to other, more famous runs on DC books.

It was *Showcase* #20 (May-Jun 1959) that first featured Rip Hunter. The artwork for that issue was done by Ruben Moreira. Hunter had a follow-up appearance in the next issue, #21 (Jul-Aug 1959) with pencils by Mike Sekowsky and inks by Joe Giella. He got another two-issue run in *Showcase* for issues #25 and #26. This time out, the pencils were handled by Joe Kubert.

In early 1961, Hunter was given his own title. The first three issues saw the book penciled by Ross Andru with the inking done by Mike Esposito. Numbers 5 and 6 were done by Nick Cardy and #7 was done by Alex Toth. Jack Miller was the author on all these issues.

It is with issue #8 that Ely picks up the book and stays with it as the primary artist until the book was canceled with #29 (which featured a good looking cover by Gil Kane). It is a strong testament to Ely's skill that the book lasted as long as it did. Especially when you consider the number of high quality artists that he had to follow.

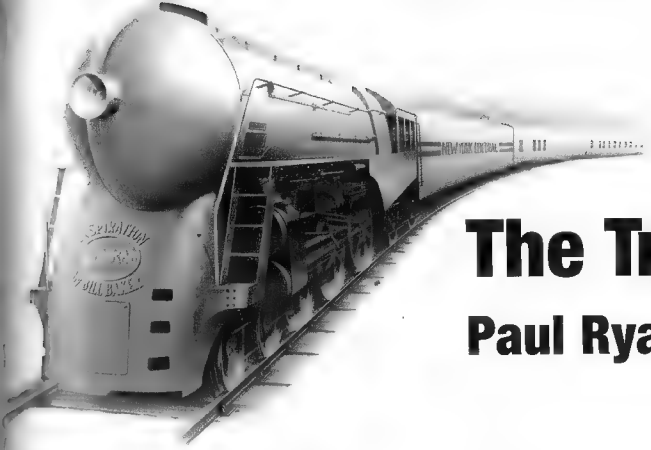
Jack Miller wrote the character from the beginning. He stayed on until issue #23, where Kashdan assumed writing until the end of the run.

While many credit Miller with the character's creation, there is a question as to DC's motivation for actually publishing the character. More than one historian has speculated that DC was actually looking for a way to get dinosaurs onto a *Showcase* cover and they needed a character to support the dinosaur's appearance. Both science fiction and dinosaurs were selling books in the late fifties and some have suggested that the dinosaur cover preceded the hero. Editors at DC were known to have occasionally created the cover before the story.

Again, this is just speculation and none of this is meant as a slam towards Miller. He was a very imaginative and enjoyable writer. He is also credited with the creation of Mark Merlin and possibly Lady Blackhawk. His skill helped Aquaman break out of his back-up feature status in the early sixties. It is more than likely that at least 99 percent of the character and team was his creation.

Absent for a long time after his cancellation, Hunter has occasionally popped up since the middle seventies. Today, he just stopped by the current JSA title and actually fit in very well. The original run of *Rip Hunter* is by no means a landmark in the era of comics, but to a ten year old kid who had just read H. G. Wells for the first time, it was amazing. The character had a good run and DC gave him a fair chance. When he shows up in a book today, I am always glad to see him.

On a separate note, what would I do if I could go back in time? I would try to re-experience the thrill of finding the first issue of *Comic Book Marketplace* that I ever read. As amazed as I was at finding Rip Hunter at age ten, I was equally amazed to find this magazine at age 40. Thanks to everyone who has ever edited, written, drawn, or read this magazine. You have made more than a few hours of my life pass by with pleasure.



The Truth of the Tale

Paul Ryan on his influences

interview conducted by Bill Baker

For nearly a generation Paul Ryan has been one of the true mainstays of the industry, often serving as the artist of one or more of Marvel Comics' premiere projects in the space of a single year. And whether you've encountered his work through the Squadron Supreme *and* Eternals *mini series, during his stints on* West Coast Avengers, Iron Man, Fantastic Four, *or any of his other assignments for the House of Ideas or its Distinguished Competition, it's a sure bet that you were struck not just by his realistic rendering of the characters and their environs, but also his amazing ability to visually realize the story in an exciting, visceral manner that highlights both the actions and emotions of the players involved.*

For Ryan, this talent lies at the heart of his endeavors—and bears greatly upon what constitutes good comic book art.

Comic Book Marketplace: Paul, I was wondering who some of your earliest inspirations in the comics field might have been?

Paul Ryan: The first people I can remember, even before I got into reading comic books, were working in the newspaper strips. People like Hal Foster, and Sy Barry, and Dan Barry. And who used to do *Flash Gordon* years ago? Mac Raboy. I really liked his work, too. So those are the kind of guys who really inspired me to draw and to tell stories when I was much younger.

Later, when I got into reading comic books, I was just crazy about Superman when I was a kid. So I loved Wayne Boring, and when I discovered Curt Swan, he was *the* man. For me, he was *the* Superman artist.

CBM: What about Curt's work really grabbed your attention and imagination?

Ryan: It was more realistic than all the others. His Superman was not the barrel-chested character that the "Schuster school" came up with, or that Wayne Boring drew. This was like a Steve Reeves, with a cape. His anatomy was great. His people were realistic. Each person was easily identifiable as a separate, individual person. As much as I like Wayne Boring, all his women were the same woman, all his men, basically, were the same man. And he had standard poses for Superman and what he was doing. Curt Swan came along, and it was kind of like being introduced to Norman Rockwell. So, for me, he was the "Good Superman Artist" [Laughter] even though I didn't know his name, because DC never put credits in their books at the time.

CBM: What about Curt's exceptional skill at storytelling? Did you notice that back then?

Ryan: No, I really wasn't that conscious of storytelling. I think the thing is, his storytelling was *so* seamless that you didn't notice it. Generally, when

you notice storytelling, it's when somebody does it poorly. Storytelling—*good* storytelling—should invite you into the story, and submerge you into the atmosphere of the story. Bad storytelling has something akin to speed bumps, and you get jarred back into reality and so then have to work your way back into the story.

CBM: You mentioned Raboy and Foster, among others, earlier. What about their work interested you early on? Was it something similar to what excited you about Swan's work?

Ryan: Yes. Raboy had an interesting style I liked, but Foster was in the same vein as Curt Swan. His draftsmanship was so *perfect*. Even now, whenever I have doubts about how to show a reflective surface of water, or waves, or ships on the ocean, or specific backgrounds, I look to him. Foster, first of all, was an outdoorsman, even before he got into illustrating. So he knew the real world outside. He had been to the forests. He had been to the jungles. He had been on the water. He was kind of a Renaissance man actually. But, anything he didn't know, he looked up so that everything was real.

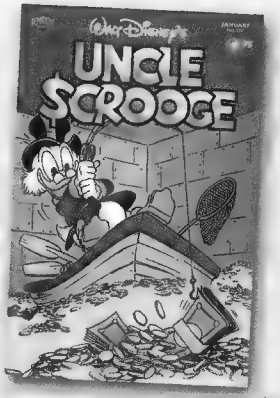
When he took Prince Valiant to America, showing Niagara Falls, the specific types of trees and the flora and fauna around that area—it *still* takes my breath away! I still wish that, someday, I could be as good as he was then. Something to strive for.

CBM: Anyone else who had a big influence on your career that you'd care to mention?

Ryan: Yes. Jim Shooter. When I was first hired, he took me aside and showed me all the basic techniques and approaches to comic book storytelling. Stuff I still use to this day. And I know that he did the same for a lot—a whole lot—of folks still working today, even though he often doesn't get any credit for it.

To learn more about Paul Ryan's work and career, go to ***www.secondstargraphics.com/index.html****, his home on the web. Readers who'd like to continue following Bill Baker's work in the future are advised to check out* Baker's Dozen, *his bi-weekly online column of short interviews with comic book creators, which is found at* ***www.WorldFamousComics.com/BakersDozen****, and to look for the grand opening of his official website,* ***www.BloodintheGutters.com****, in August, 2005.*

THE DUCK AND THE MOUSE SENT TO YOUR HOUSE!



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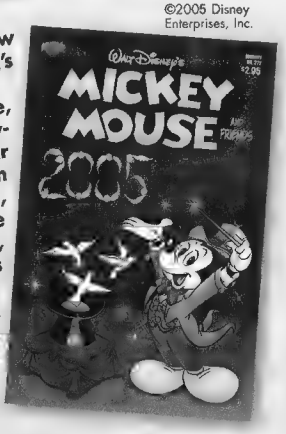

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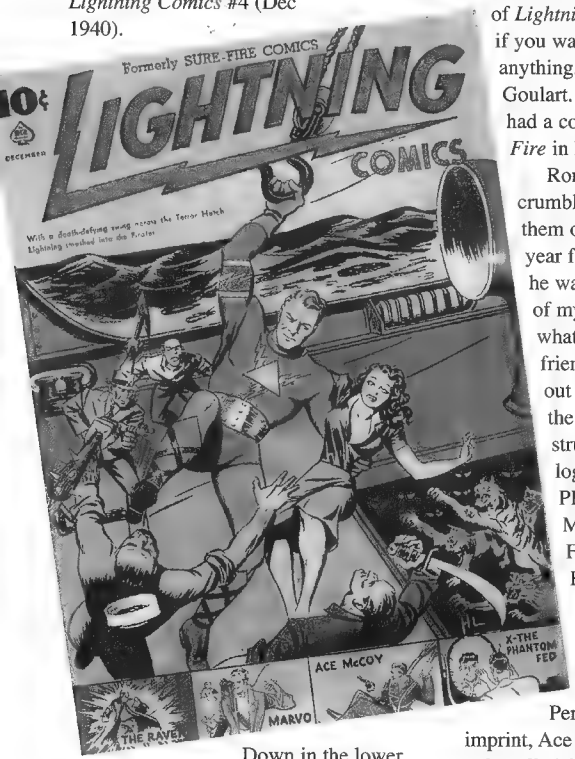
UNMASKED "X"

THE PHANTOM FED

by Will Murray

I thought I knew every pulp hero that was ever adapted for comic books. Once I could confidently tick off every single character from The Shadow to the Phantom Detective who had been given the four-color treatment in the early Golden Age of Comics. Then one day I was leafing through Ernie Gerber's *Photo-Journal Guide to Comic Books,* and my eye alighted on the cover of *Lightning Comics* #4 (Dec 1940).



Down in the lower corner, at the end of a strip showcasing the supporting heroes backing up Flash Lightning, was a nondescript man making up his features before a huge triple mirror. He was called the Phantom Fed. I thought, *That looks like*—No, it couldn't be, I decided. Then I checked the publisher. Ace Comics. Hmmm. Maybe I was onto something here.

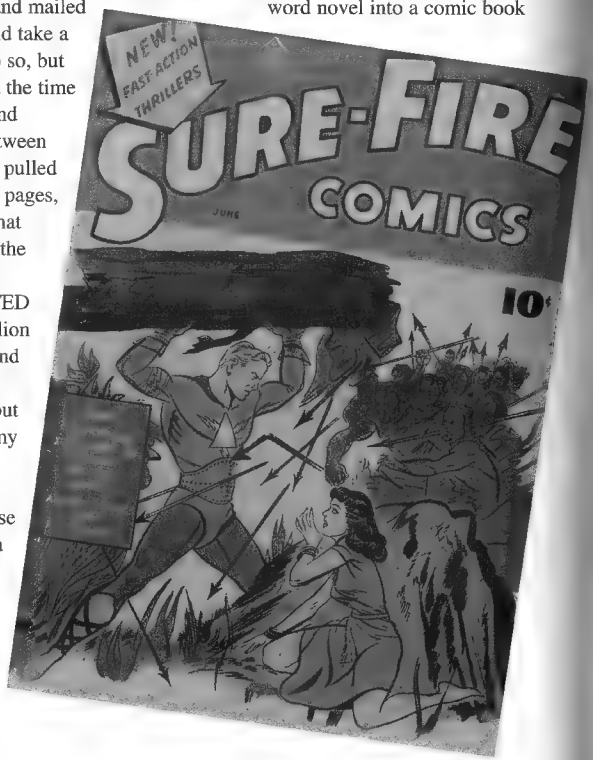
Reaching for *Overstreet*, I quickly learned that the Phantom Fed had appeared in the first four issues of *Sure-Fire Comics*, and in the fifth issue, re-titled *Lightning Comics* after its star super-hero, Flash Lightning. But nowhere else. Evidently, he was an early casualty of the Golden Age. I couldn't remember the last time I saw a copy of *Lightning Comics* or *Sure-Fire*. But if you want to get to the bottom of anything, call an expert. I called Ron Goulart. As luck would have it, he had a couple of early copies of *Sure-Fire* in his files, including #1.

Ron kindly photocopied his crumbling copies and mailed them off. Yes, it did take a year for him to do so, but he was moving at the time of my request. And what's a year between friends? When I pulled out the batch of pages, the first thing that struck me was the logo: X THE PHANTOM FED Man of a Million Faces by Brand House.

This all but confirmed my suspicions. Under its Periodical House imprint, Ace had issued a pulp called *Secret Agent "X"* between 1934-39, which starred a mysterious crime fighter who, like character actor Lon Chaney, was known as the Man of a Thousand Faces. The byline was the most obvious house name in the history of pulp publishing, Brant House (why Ace bothered changing Brant to Brand for comics baffles me).

A block caption gave the story a title, "Ambassador of Doom." I didn't have to go running to my stack of *Secret Agent "X"*s to confirm this was an adaptation of the fourth "X" novel, *The Ambassador of Doom.* The hooded villain of that tale, the Green Mask, was right there in the first panel. And he's after the plans to a "secret shock ray" the US government thinks is too terrible to ever be used as a weapon of war.

Generally, the comic adaptation follows that 1934 novel. I say generally because it's hard to boil down a 50,000 word novel into a comic book



continuity even though the unknown author took an unusual 15 pages to do so. For 1940, that's a longish story. Superman stories typically ran only 13 pages. *Sure-Fire #1* cover-featured Flash Lightning, and they only gave him 13 pages behind the Phantom Fed lead feature.

Throughout the tale, the hero is called X-the Phantom Fed, which is a pretty awkward construction. The unknown writer followed the pulp style of just calling him X for short. He also followed the house style of the original "X" novels, which were full of horror and torture and maiming. In one grisly scene ripped from the novel, a victim is scratched along one forearm and a substance called *kepshak,* described by the Green Mask as "the pollen of the blossom that loosens men's tongues", is poured on. The mangled victim writhes and writhes and finally spills his guts, figuratively speaking. Then with a horrible shriek, he dies.

Well, what would you expect from a series whose premiere novel was entitled *The Torture Trust*, and concerned a band of crazed extortionists who delighted in throwing acid in their victim's faces? The follow-up novels were called *The Spectral Strangler* and *The Death-Torch Terror*. And they didn't get any sunnier after that. For example, in *The Hooded Hordes* that brutal band delighted in pouring boiling lead down the throats of their victims.

In the climax, after the Phantom Fed has unmasked the villainous Green Mask aboard a plane, he grabs a handy parachute and jumps clear. But not before leaving his calling card: a black X burned into a white business card.

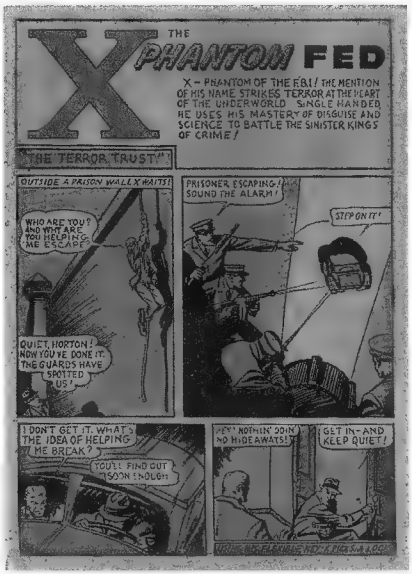
Reading it, an astonished naval officer blurts out, "Secret Agent X! The greatest of them all! What a Man! And what an exit!" This is the only time the character's original name is given.

Harry Lucey was the artist. He also drew Flash Lighting and Magno the Magnetic Man for Ace, illustrating their premiere adventures before surrendering those characters to others. At MLJ he later did the Hangman, Madame Satan and Sam Hill, then went to relative obscurity anonymously drawing Archie Andrews. He was obviously Ace's big gun in the year 1940.

The second Phantom Fed story is a synoptic version of *The Torture Trust*. Why adapt the first Secret Agent "X" novel second? Search me. But here, the villains call themselves the Terror Trust. I guess Ace thought terrorists were more suitable for kids' reading than torturers. The anonymous scripter also changed the real names of the original band of acid-throwing extortionists. Betty Dale, the crime-hating girl reporter who aided "X" in many of his pulp exploits, plays a prominent role in this one. She hated crime because her policeman father had been murdered by hoods.

The story starts with X helping to break a hood named Horton out of prison just so he can hypnotize him into revealing the secrets of the Terror Trust, who kidnap wealthy men and threaten to destroy their faces with acid unless a handsome ransom is paid. Assuming Horton's identity, X follows a convoluted trail that requires him to change disguises every page or so. One minute, he's a common taxi driver, the next he's the

THE PHANTOM FED
MAN OF A MILLION FACES
by BRAND HOUSE
"AMBASSADOR OF DOOM"
MEET X
— DEATH —
THE STORY BEGINS IN THE SECRET DEN OF THE GREEN MASK
A SENATE COMMITTEE IS MEETING TODAY TO VOTE ON DESTRUCTION OF THE PLANS. THE FOOLS THINK IT'S TOO HORRIBLE TO USE — I DISAGREE
THE BLUEPRINTS ARE IN THE HANDS OF CAPTAIN NELSON NOW PRESENT AT THE MEETING.... NUMBER EIGHT YOU WILL TAKE CARE OF THE CAPTAIN AND RELIEVE HIM OF THE PAPERS. THEN NO DICTATOR... KING OR PRESIDENT RULES US — WE RULE THEM!
AS CAPTAIN NELSON DEPARTS A MENACING FIGURE PREPARES TO STRIKE
AND THE CAPTAIN IS FELLED BY A CRUEL BLOW FROM BEHIND


THE X PHANTOM FED
X = PHANTOM OF THE FBI! THE MENTION OF HIS NAME STRIKES TERROR AT THE HEART OF THE UNDERWORLD. SINGLE HANDED HE USES HIS MASTERY OF DISGUISE AND SCIENCE TO BATTLE THE SINISTER KINGS OF CRIME!
"THE TERROR TRUST"!
OUTSIDE A PRISON WALL X WAITS!
PRISONER ESCAPING! SOUND THE ALARM!
WHO ARE YOU? AND WHAT ARE YOU HELPING ME ESCAPE
STEP ON IT!
QUIET, HORTON! NOW YOU'VE DONE IT. THE GUARDS HAVE SPOTTED US!
I DON'T GET IT. WHAT'S THE IDEA OF HELPING ME BREAK?
YOU'LL FIND OUT SOON ENOUGH
GET IN—AND KEEP QUIET!

NOW YOU JUST PARK HERE WHILE I MAKE A PHONE CALL
IN THE CITY ROOM OF A NEWSPAPER BETTY DALE LIFTS THE RECEIVER OF HER PHONE
HELLO X WHAT? YOU'RE LEAVING A CONTACT IN MY ROOM? OKAY I'LL KEEP HIM UNDER COVER FOR YOU
THE TERROR TRUST JUST THREW ACID ON ANOTHER MILLIONAIRE PLAYBOY WHO WOULDN'T KICK IN
HE'LL BE SMASHED AND YOU GET THE STORY FOR WATCHING MY PRIZE PACKAGE
AND AS FOR WHAT'S NEW?
BACK IN BETTY'S APARTMENT PRIVATEERS HORTON AND LANHORN TAKE PLACE OF THE TERRORISTS
AND THAT'S THE TRUTH, SO HELP ME HONEST
YOU COULDN'T DO IT NOW IF YOU WANTED TO PAL
THAT NIGHT— AT HIS HIDE UP IN LE WITH A ROGUES GALLERY PHOTOGRAPH BEFORE HIM X APPLIES A PLASTIC SUBSTANCE TO HIS FACE
FINALLY HE PULLS A SKULL CAP OVER HIS HEAD AND WITH THIS DEFT TOUCH X BECOMES HORTON!
THERE, THAT OUGHT TO DO THE TRICK
AN HOUR LATER A DISGUISED AS HORTON APPEARS AT THE HIDEOUT OF THE TERRORISTS
WAREHOUSE
OKAY, YOU'RE HORTON ALL RIGHT, I'D KNOW HIM ANYWHERE

YOUR ESCAPE WAS CLEVER, HORTON. WE WILL USE YOU SOON. BE READY. THAT'S ALL
OUTSIDE, X HIDES!
JUST WANTED TO LOOK ME OVER EH? OKAY, BUDDY, NOW I'LL HAVE A LOOK AT YOU!
TRAILING ONE OF THE GANG, X IS SURPRISED WHEN HIS QUARRY LEADS HIM TO A WEALTHY RESIDENTIAL SECTION
WHY THAT'S THE HOME OF PROFESSOR PARKS— THE PSYCHOLOGIST. I'D BETTER LOOK AROUND
MAYBE THAT SAFE'LL REVEAL SOMETHING!
WHEW! THIS IS SOMETHING A LIST OF THE TERROR TRUST CRIMES, BUT—
NOT SO FAST, X! YES— I KNOW YOU HORTON WAS TOO DUMB TO BREAK STIR. I FIGURED HE HAD HE'D YOUR FUNS OVER NOW!
I HOPE THE AIR IN MY SHOE WORKS!

police commissioner. For the climax, X infiltrates a secret meeting of the Terror Trust, dressed in the same canary-yellow robes and hoods they wear. They resemble the Green Mask in triplicate. After Betty Dale busts in with the riot squad, X slips out, once again tricked out as the commissioner.

Along the way, he employs some of the gimmicks the original Secret Agent "X" employed in the source novel—a dart-firing compressed air gun built into his shoe and acid capsules for escaping traps. In the final panel's caption, the name Phantom Fed is squeezed in by a re-letterer, suggesting his true name of Secret Agent "X" hiding under the ink and opaque.

Next up, the Phantom Fed struggles with the evil Dr. Horton—there's that name again—whose reign of terror involves injecting germs into apes, which escape and begin spreading a contagion that affects only the very rich in the quarantined town of Branton. His criminal gang also pretend to have been transformed into gorillas. Since this is comics, I have to wonder—why not go all the way and just transform them into actual apes? Probably because this poor tale is taken from the pages of the fifth Secret Agent "X" novel, *City of the Living Dead*.

The art credits to the Phantom Fed are a merry-go-round of mystery. Harry Lucey left the strip after the "Terror Trust" tale. The follow-up stories are by anonymous artists neither Ron Goulart nor I can identify. The ape adventure was by a guy who worked in the industry only two years before vanishing. His credits include Ace's Sky Smith and

AFTER DRIVING SEVERAL BLOCKS, X PURPOSELY SLAMS ON THE BRAKES
OUCH!
A LITTLE ROUGH— BUT EFFECTIVE
X TAKES HIS PRISONER TO A HIDEAWAY
YOU CAN'T HYPNOTIZE ME, MY WILL IS TOO STRONG
MAYBE I HAVE SOMETHING THAT WILL BREAK IT DOWN
THIS INJECTION IS HARMLESS, BUT IT'LL MAKE HIM TALK
MY PARTNERS ARE LAWRENCE WRIGHT, SOCIALITE CLUBMAN, AND DOCTOR RAMSEY, THE SURGEON. WE ARE THE TERROR TRUST. TONIGHT WE WILL KIDNAP SIR ANTHONY BRATTON—
BETTY DALE RECEIVES A PHONE CALL!
X! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT?
SIR ANTHONY IS DUE TONIGHT. I'VE GOT TO HURRY TO CATCH HIS SHIP
YES, LISTEN CAREFULLY. IN A—
BACK IN THE HIDEAWAY X DISGUISES HIMSELF AS THE POLICE COMMISSIONER
PLEASANT DREAMS, PROFESSOR
I'M ALMOST CONVINCED I'M THE COMMISSIONER. WELL, COME ON, PROFESSOR. HERE WE GO AGAIN!

AT THE HARBOR, X SPEEDS TOWARD THE LINER
THERE SHE IS! DROPPING ANCHOR AT CUSTOMS
COMING ALONGSIDE, X CLIMBS ABOARD
THIS SIR ANTHONY'S A BIG SHOT
TEAM WORK! MOSLEY THEY SAY THERE'S THE POLICE COMMISSIONER, WHAT'S UP?
X, DISGUISED AS THE COMMISSIONER, HAS NO TROUBLE IN SEEING SIR ANTHONY—
LOYE-TO SAY THERE'S A PLOT AGAINST MY LIFE? WHAT SHALL I DO?
YOU'D BETTER COME WITH ME. IT'S SAFER
HE'S RIGHT SIR
X ODE IDES IN SIR ANTHONY—
SO YOU'RE AT WELL, I'LL BE GLAD TO HELP
I WAS SURE YOU WOULD. MY CAR IS PARKED BY THE PIER. WE'LL DRIVE TO THE WAREHOUSE
AT THE WAREHOUSE AGAIN
THERE'S NO ONE ABOUT
GOOD. LET'S GET INSIDE WITH THIS BIRD
I THINK THIS IS THE LOCKER YOU'RE LOOKING FOR
THERE'S A ROBE AND HOOD IN THERE. HAND IT OUT
WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH PARKS?
I'LL TAKE CARE OF HIM A MOMENT

BOY, YOU'RE CERTAINLY GOIN' PLACES TONIGHT
MEANWHILE, IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER—
I WONDER WHAT'S KEEPING PARKS WE'VE GOT TO GET STARTED
I GUESS WE'RE READY NOW, EH?
OOK—HE'S HERE AND SIR ANTHONY WITH HIM!
YOU GOT HIM ALL BY YOURSELF?
HE WAS EASY
WE'LL TAKE HIM DOWNSTAIRS
I DEMAND TO BE RELEASED
YOU WILL— AFTER YOU SIGN A CERTAIN LETTER
THE ACID BRIGADE ARRIVES!
WE'RE READY
HELL SIGN NOW!
I WON'T ASK THE BRITISH CONSUL FOR TWO MILLION FOR MY RELEASE! I REFUSE TO SELL OUT MY COUNTRY
OKAY, THEN YOU EAT THE ACID
COPS! A GIRL IS BRINGING THEM HUNDREDS OF
WAIT!

ONLY WITH A DART THAT'LL PRODUCE SLEEP TOO BAD I'VE GOT TO GO, BUT YOU'VE MANAGED TO WAKEN THE WHOLE HOUSE!
THERE HE GOES. GET HIM!
SOME OTHER TIME I'M BUSY RIGHT NOW!
GONE! BOTH OF THEM! BUT WHAT'S THIS?
THE TERROR-TRUST! THEY FREED HORTON AND CAPTURED BETTY TO FIND OUT WHAT SHE KNOWS ABOUT ME! I'VE GOT TO HELP HER!
COME ON, WHAT KIND OF GOVERNMENT AGENT ARE YOU? TALK OR YOU GET THE ACID IN YOUR PRETTY FACE
BUT—I—I

X — IT'S YOU!
FIGURED THEY'D TAKE YOU HERE QUICK. GOTO THE BARTON HOTEL WHILE I HOLD OFF THESE MEN!
THAT SMOKE BOMB WILL KEEP THEM BUSY. COME ON, BETTY!
WHEN X RECOVERS HE FINDS HIMSELF IMPRISONED IN A CELL GUARDED BY A MASSIVE STEEL DOOR
MAYBE MY ACID CAPSULES CAN BURN AWAY THESE HINGES
DOOOH—MY HEAD! NOW WHAT? I HAVE IT!
THERE! THAT'S DONE IT!
OUTSIDE X HAGGLES FOR A CAR!
HEY, HE GOT AWAY! STOP HIM SOMEBODY!

AFTER HIM!
COMING TO A WHARF, X DARINGLY PLUNGES THE CAR INTO THE RIVER
INSTANTLY HIS PURSUERS JUMP TO THE SHOT
BUT X IS HIDING UNDER THE PIER
IN AN ALLEY, X CREATES A NEW DISGUISE
I'LL JUST LEAVE THIS MONEY AND BORROW THIS CAB TO GO BACK TO THE WAREHOUSE
AS X ROARS AWAY!
MY CAB! WHAT—500 BUCKS! I WAIT TILL THE GUYS INSIDE SEE THIS!
CABBIE!
PARKS! WHAT A BREAK
YES SIR!

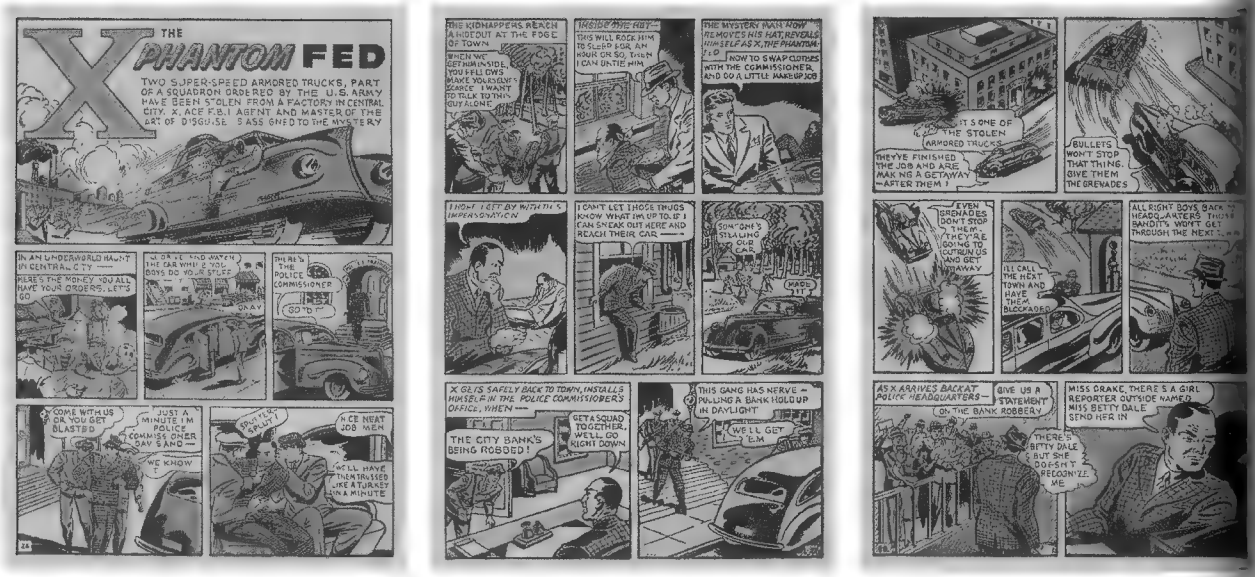
Whiz Comics' Dan Dare. After that, another mystery artist takes over for one issue. I can't place him. But I do recognize the untitled tale in the October 1940 *Sure-Fire Comics* (it's misnumbered #3, but it's really #4) he drew. This is a ten-page compression of the 1938 Secret Agent "X" novel, *Claws of the Corpse Cult*. This was one of the more intriguing later "X" novels, partly because it's set in Hawaii and delves into the background of "X"'s mysterious superior, K9, called Ronald Holme in the pulp story.

Here it's a vapid, unintriguing mini-mystery about a European government plot to torpedo an Oriental liner and plunge the US into war with a "great Asiatic power"—Japan no doubt—with practically everyone involved wearing white tropical suits. The art is weak and the story is especially poor. And the trouble with the Phantom Fed quickly becomes evident. If your hero is always running around changing clothes and faces, it's hard to tell the good guys from the bad. And there's nothing for the reader to grab on to, identification-wise. At least The Shadow had that floppy hat and cloak. Here, X changes his disguise three different times—but only a sharp-eyed reader can see much difference between his impersonations. What worked on the silent screen for the original Man of a Thousand Faces, actor Lon Chaney, and became a reliable pulp-hero formula, fell flat in four color.

COME BACK YOU FOOLS!
BACK INTO THE LOCKER ROOM QUICK OR I'LL BLOW OFF YOUR HEADS!
LET PARKS OUT AND PUT THESE IN HIS CELL
THE COPS!
WHAT—THOSE THREE—LAWRENCE WRIGHT—DR. RAMSEY AND PROFESSOR PARKS—THE TERROR TRUST! GEE COMMISSIONER, YOU TOOK AN AWFUL CHANCE!
SIR ANTHONY'S TESTIMONY WILL CONVICT THEM ALL
SURE BETTY COME OUTSIDE
HOW DID—? X! IT'S YOU! I FOLLOWED OUT YOUR ORDERS FOR THE RAID
AND I PROMISED YOU A STORY, SO LET'S EAT AND I'LL GIVE YOU THE EXCLUSIVE ON HOW THE TERROR TRUST WAS SMASHED
AND SO ENDS ANOTHER ADVENTURE IN THE LIFE OF X, THE PHANTOM FED
DON'T MISS THE NEXT ISSUE FOR MORE HAIR-RAISING THRILLS IN X'S FIGHT ON ORGANIZED CRIME

This was a problem that plagued the original magazine. Go through any issue and look at the spot illustrations. Secret Agent "X" is invariably nondescript and ordinary-looking. We never really see his true face, only his impersonations. It's the same with the covers. They focus on the villain more often than not. There's no identifying face or look or trademark that says to a prospective reader: This is Secret Agent "X." For all intents and purposes the Man of a Thousand Faces was a faceless non-entity. Many early covers show a multitude of floating faces meant to symbolize the many identities "X" assumes. At least the rival Thrilling Group gave the other pulp Man of a Thousand Faces, the

THE PHANTOM FED
X, F.B.I. PHANTOM AND PAST MASTER IN THE ART OF MAKE UP AND DISGUISE, IS PREPARING TO INVESTIGATE A MYSTERIOUS EPIDEMIC WHICH HAS STRUCK THE TOWN OF BRANTON. IN ORDER TO GET INTO THE QUARANTINED TOWN, WHICH HAS BEEN ENCIRCLED WITH BARBED WIRE FENCES AND GUARDED BY TROOPERS, X ADOPTS THE MAKEUP OF A PHYSICIAN. . . .
X, AS DOCTOR PHELPS, APPROACHES BRANTON—
STRANGE THAT SO FAR THIS EPIDEMIC HAS ONLY STRUCK DOWN RICH PEOPLE
GUESS IT'S ALL RIGHT FOR YOU TO ENTER, DOCTOR, BUT WATCH OUT FOR ESCAPED GORILLAS WHICH ARE SPREADING THE DISEASE
GORILLAS! GOOD HEAVENS!
X PROCEEDS TO THE MAYOR'S OFFICE
YOU'RE VERY WELCOME HERE, DR. PHELPS. WE'RE HARD PRESSED FOR MEDICAL CARE. THE HORTON INSTITUTE WAS EXPERIMENTING WITH THE GERM INJECTED INTO GORILLAS, AND—
—THE GORILLAS ESCAPED AND SPREAD THE DISEASE. A TERRIBLE THING, MAYOR LANE!
LEAVING THE MAYOR, X SCOUTS AROUND
THAT LOOKS LIKE A GORILLA IN THAT MANSION


THE PHANTOM FED
TWO SUPER-SPEED ARMORED TRUCKS, PART OF A SQUADRON ORDERED BY THE U.S. ARMY HAVE BEEN STOLEN FROM A FACTORY IN CENTRAL CITY. X, ACE F.B.I. AGENT AND MASTER OF THE ART OF DISGUISE PASSED TO THE MYSTERY
THE KIDNAPPERS REACH A HIDEOUT AT THE EDGE OF TOWN
INSIDE THE HUT
THE MYSTERY MAN NOW REMOVES HIS HAT, REVEALS HIMSELF AS X, THE PHANTOM FED
IT'S ONE OF THE STOLEN ARMORED TRUCKS
BULLETS WON'T STOP THAT THING. GIVE THEM THE GRENADES
THEY'VE FINISHED THE JOB AND ARE MAKING A GETAWAY AFTER THEM!
EVEN GRENADES DON'T STOP THEM! THEY'RE GOING TO OUTRUN US AND GET AWAY!
I'LL CALL THE NEXT TOWN AND HAVE THEM BLOCKADED
ALL RIGHT BOYS, BACK TO HEADQUARTERS! THOSE BANDITS WON'T GET THROUGH THE NEXT...
X GETS SAFELY BACK TO TOWN, INSTALLS HIMSELF IN THE POLICE COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE, WHEN—
THE CITY BANK'S BEING ROBBED!
GET A SQUAD TOGETHER, WELL GO RIGHT DOWN
THIS GANG HAS NERVE — PULLING A BANK HOLDUP IN DAYLIGHT
WELL GET 'EM
X & X ARRIVES BACK AT POLICE HEADQUARTERS—
GIVE US A STATEMENT OF THE BANK ROBBERY
MISS DRAKE, THERE'S A GIRL REPORTER OUTSIDE NAMED MISS BETTY DALE SEND HER IN
THERE'S BETTY DALE BUT SHE DOESN'T RECOGNIZE ME

Phantom Detective, a recognizable cover image: they showed him in a top hat and domino mask.

Few pulp fans connect "X" with another fictional secret agent with an X in his codename. But "X" had a newspaper strip rival that ultimately eclipsed him. *Secret Agent "X"* debuted with a February 1934 cover date. A patent on the trademark was filed December 1, 1933, claiming use since November 8. The first issue was actually released on December 13. If this is a coincidence, it's a pretty amazing one. For on January 22, 1934, King Features Syndicate released Alex Raymond's exciting new newspaper strip, *Secret Agent X-9*. King filed for the trademark on February 14, 1934.

The similarity between the two Secret Agents is remarkable. Both are nameless operatives of an unnamed federal agency. X-9 is supposed to be working for the government, but he acts like a for-hire private eye. "X" is a lone-wolf type operator, too. In the official records of the Department of Justice, the man who became Secret Agent "X" is listed as deceased, the better to fight crime anonymously. Although wanted by the police who think he's a criminal, "X" is sanctioned by the real-life "Crime Commission" and reports to a shadowy "high Washington official" known only as K9. Hmmm. The coincidences do mount, don't they? Since originating writer Paul Chadwick was fond of naming subordinate characters after fellow pulp writers, (Police Inspector John Burks was modeled after pulpster Arthur J. Burks and the Agent's assistant Harvey Bates comes from Harry Bates, author of the pulp story later adapted as the classic film *The Day the Earth Stood Still,* "Farewell to the Master.") I suspect K9 was an in-joke meant to be read as "canine." If so, the inspiration could only be the bulldog-faced director of the FBI, J. Edgar Hoover.

By the late 1930s, it was finally revealed that X-9 had been, all along, working for the FBI. When his superior was drawn, he was modeled after Hoover. X-9 finally got a real name, too. Early in the strip, he told people to call him "Dexter," admitting that wasn't his real name. That was finally revealed as Phil Corrigan.

Pulp collectors see Secret Agent "X" as a low-rent mix of The Shadow and Doc Savage, with a strong Phantom Detective influence. And he certainly combines obvious qualities of all three characters. Like The Shadow, he's a mystery man with a wartime espionage background, his true name and face unknown. He shares with Doc Savage an arsenal of non-lethal crime-fighting gadgets and a signature birdlike whistling call similar to Doc's evocative trilling. Like the Phantom Detective, Agent "X"'s M.O. is that he's a master of disguise and impersonation.

The style of the series, however, was all its own. An atmospheric mix of melodrama and madness, as this excerpt from the prologue to the first issue literally shouts:

"Secret Agent 'X'—man of a thousand faces—a thousand disguises—a thousand surprises! Detective extraordinary! Master investigator! Pledged hunter of criminals!

"His past? A question mark wrapped in the black folds of Mystery. His present? A living threat to those who follow the crimson trails of crime. His future? A toss of Fate's dice on the gaming tables of Doom.

"With the sword of Courage, the rapier of Wit, the gleaming lance of Cunning, he goes where others dare not follow. Along the black byways of the underworld where Horror stalks. Into the shadows of hideous Death. Down through the twisting valleys of Terror.

"Concealed by disguises that no man can penetrate, using bizarre weapons with the magic of Science behind them, he pits himself against the spreading Tarantula webs of crime.

"The Law does not recognize him. The police suspect him. The underworld hates him. Between them he threads his perilous way, philosophical in defeat, stoical in the face of danger, courageous always; mocking the forces that seek to destroy him, with Justice his only goal and Adventure his only reward."

No pulp writer ever laid it on so thick as Paul Chadwick did on Secret Agent

"X." Although Chadwick claimed that the "X" symbolized the unknown, the codename was also inspired by a strange X-shaped abdominal wound the Agent received during World War I. Although "X" employs cover names and secret identities like Elisha Pond and Associated Press reporter A. J. Martin, his true name remained forever unrevealed.

I have to wonder if Secret Agent X-9 wasn't an equal if not greater influence on the creation of Secret Agent "X". Conceived by King Features as a way to cash in on the huge vogue of detective heroes, they hired the great Dashiell Hammett of *Maltese Falcon* fame to script the strip, and Alex Raymond to draw it. King Features' publisher William Randolph Hearst was said to have ordered the new crime strip to compete directly with *Dick Tracy* and *Dan Dunn, Secret Operative 48*. There was a lot of pre-release publicity in advance of the strip, including a full-page ad depicting Dashiell Hammett in the newspaper trade magazine, *Editor and Publisher*.

Certainly Editor Rose Wyn of Periodical House could have been aware of said publicity. She could have gotten writer Paul Chadwick, the first Brant House, to whip together a pulp novel incorporating the skeletal idea of Secret Agent X-9—a mystery operative of an unnamed federal agency—with equal shots of Doc Savage, The Shadow and the Phantom blended into the concoction.

Pulp editors were often inspired by popular movies in launching new projects. In 1933, Hollywood released a film called *Private Detective 62,* based on a Hammett idea. This film might have motivated Rose Wyn, who split off from husband A. A. Wyn's Magazine Publishers to launch her own pulp house that fall. *Secret Agent "X"* was one of Periodical House's first efforts. For all we know, she might have had a differently-named character in production and the close coincidence of the release of their new book with the debut of Secret Agent X-9 inspired Wyn to rename her character to cash in on the free publicity. This might also explain why the "X" in Secret Agent "X" was in quotes. It was a legal fig leaf.

If that was the case, they got away with it. When a Secret Agent X-9 radio program began airing later in 1934, it didn't hurt the name recognition—or should I say confusion?—of Secret Agent "X". Actually, the initial-number form of ID isn't as hokey as it sounds. This was exactly the style of in-house identification the Pinkerton Detective Agency used to employ. Since Hammett was once a Pinkerton, it's obvious where that came from.

After two years, Paul Chadwick phased out of the series. Emile C. Tepperman did a few before going on to ghost the Spider. Then in 1935, G.T. Fleming-Roberts took over the series. The novels shrunk progressively, the G-Man angle was played up, Agent "X" lost the quote marks around his mysterious initial. But the magazine never lost its horror-terror-torture slant, and continued to offer up wild effusions like *Faceless Fury, Brand of the Metal Maiden, Horde of the Damned* and *Kingdom of Blue Corpses*. He battled super-criminals that would fit right in during the Golden Age of Comics—masked monsters like Thoth, the Blue Spark, the Skull, the Scorpion, the Terror, the Ghoul, Doctor Blood, Emperor Zero, the Brain and the Golden God. Collectively, they made Batman's rogue's gallery look like colorful juvenile delinquents.

Every Phantom Fed strip turns out to have been adapted from one of these weird wonders, although after the first installment the wanton violence and horror were toned down. Robert Turner, who took over editing and writing the Ace comics in 1940, used to say that his job was to adapt old pulp stories into comics. For a few months, he scripted the entire contents of every issue of Ace's *Sure-Fire* and *Super-Mystery Comics*. No doubt he was behind some of the Phantom Fed scripts.

A second *Sure-Fire* feature seems to owe its existence to another defunct Ace pulp series, Frederick C. Davis' Moon Man ran in *Ten Detective Aces* from 1933 to 1937. The Moon Man was really police Detective Sergeant Steve Thatcher who battled crime in a black cloak and globe helmet made of one-way glass that made him look like a cross between The Shadow and the Man in the Moon. He was assisted by Sue McEwen, daughter of Police

THE PHANTOM FED
X, MYSTERY MAN OF THE F.B.I. AND MASTER OF ALL DISGUISES, GOES TO THE GARDEN-ROOF TERRACE OF A HONOLULU CAFE TO MEET AN AGENT
A CERTAIN EUROPEAN POWER IS TRYING HARD TO GET THE U.S. INVOLVED IN WAR WITH A GREAT ASIATIC POWER. I'M GETTING MORE INFORMATION ABOUT IT FROM A SECRET SOURCE TONIGHT
WHEN WILL YOU BE ABLE TO TELL ME MORE, BLANE?
I'M GOING TO KEEP MY APPOINTMENT NOW. I'LL MEET YOU HERE AGAIN AT MIDNIGHT WITH COMPLETE INFORMATION
LOTS OF LUCK, BLANE
A FEW MINUTES AFTER BLANE LEAVES
I HEARD A MUFFLED CRY COMING FROM THE BARDEN: COULD BLANE HAVE RUN INTO TROUBLE?
BLANE!
WHAT HAPPENED, BLANE, OLD MAN?
I-I-ATTACKED --- WAS GOING --- GRASS SKIRT CAFE

SO NICE OF YOU TO SEE ME, COMMISSIONER. NO PAPER APPRECIATES—
THE DISGUISE EVEN FOOLS YOU, BETTY
X—THE PHANTOM FED
WHAT—?
I'M TRYING TO CATCH THE GANG THAT STOLE THE ARMY'S ARMORED CARS AND ARE USING THEM TO ROB BANKS. THE CROOKS WOULDN'T EXPECT A FED TO BE WORKING FROM THIS OFFICE
AT THAT MOMENT THE REAL COMMISSIONER APPEARS—
THERE'S THE IMPOSTER WHO STOLE MY CLOTHES! ARREST HIM FOR KIDNAPPING AND IMPERSONATING AN OFFICER!
HE'S ESCAPED!
BOY! I TRY TO MAKE A BREAK, BUDDY—
I WOULDN'T TRY IT, PA...
THIS SPECIAL CIGAR WILL FILL THIS WHOLE ROOM WITH SMOKE IN A FEW SECONDS
HEY! WHAT KIND OF A CIGAR IS THAT?
TOUGHT TO BE CA. LEO
EL SMOKO
COUGH COUGH
THIS IS A TRICK CIGAR! DON'T LET HIM GET AWAY!
COME ON, BETTY—
I—I CAN'T SEE!
OUT THIS WALL WINDOW BEFORE THEY FIND THEIR WAY OUT OF THAT SMOKE-FILLED OFFICE
YOU SHOULDN'T TAKE SUCH CHANCES

I'M GOING TO CHANGE MY DISGUISE, BETTY, TO THAT OF A NEWSPAPER REPORTER
THEN YOU AND I'LL GO DOWN TO THE BANK AND SNOOP AROUND
YOUR DISGUISES ARE WONDERFUL, X
A LITTLE GREASE PAINT AND PUTTY MAKES A LOT OF DIFFERENCE
THOSE BANDITS GOT AWAY WITH $80,000.
AND THEY WON'T STOP AT THAT. THEY MUST BE CAUGHT
THEY GET INTO THE BANK WITH BETTY'S PRESS PASS
STRAW INSIDE A BANK, THAT'S ODD
THEY SURELY WRECKED THIS PLACE
BETTY AND X ENTER THE VAULT
LOOK, X, THE POLICE MUST NOT HAVE COME DOWN HERE
HIS CARD IDENTIFIES HIM AS A BANK EXAMINER
AS THOUGH THIS MIGHT BE AN INSIDE JOB OF SOME KIND. LET'S GO OVER SOME OF THE BOOKS
OKAY
SOME KIND OF ACID HAS EATEN AWAY HIS CLOTHES. THE ARMORED CAR BANDITS MUST HAVE KILLED HIM
AND HE'S THE ONLY ONE THAT WAS KILLED BY ACID. THAT LOOKS AS THOUGH—

HERE'S THE BOOKKEEPING DEPARTMENT AND—
ONE OF THE CLERKS TIED UP
DURING THE ROBBERY ONE OF THE MEN FROM THE ARMORED CARS RUSHED IN HERE, TIED ME UP AND STOLE ALL THE BOOKS
HEAR THAT, BETTY?
I'LL GO CHECK ON EMPLOYEES WHO ARE ABSENT FROM THE BANK TODAY
THE ONLY PERSON ABSENT TODAY IS ONE OF THE VICE PRESIDENTS, MARK GORHAM. I HAVE HIS ADDRESS
I'LL GET INTO BETTY'S CAR AND—
GORHAM LIVES OUT ON THIS ROADWAY
THAT'S THE ROAD THE ARMORED TRUCKS DISAPPEARED FROM AFTER THE BANK HOLDUP
HERE'S GORHAM'S FARM
WHILE YOU INTERVIEW GORHAM, BETTY, I'LL CHANGE MY DISGUISE AND DO SOME SNOOPING
X CHANGES HIS DISGUISE TO THAT OF A HOBO AND—
THAT'S AN AWFULLY BIG BARN FOR A PLACE LIKE THIS
GOOD AFTERNOON, SIR. COULD YOU TELL ME—
GET THE HIGHWAY HOBO
SCRAM, BUM!
AND STAY AWAY! WE DON'T WANT ANY BUMS SNOOPING AROUND!
NEVER HEARD ANY FARMER SPEAK THAT LONG! I'LL LET THEM CHASE HIM THEN SNEAK AROUND THE BACK

Chief Gil McEwen. Compare that premise to *Sure-Fire's* Raven, really Detective Sergeant Danny Darkin, who dons the purple robes, fedora hat and domino mask of the Raven to combat crime. His girlfriend, Lola Lash, also helped out. Her father was the police chief.

Robert Turner may also have written the first Magno, the Magnetic Man story that ran in companion tile *Super-Mystery Comics* #1 (Jul 1940). Untitled, it was an adaptation of *Octopus of Crime* (*Secret Agent "X"* Sept 1934), with Magno in place of "X." No doubt other "X" novels were converted into comic features in this bizarre manner.

It seems clear that the Phantom Fed was planned as the star of *Sure-Fire Comics*. He had the lead story in the first issue. It was also the longest one. I suspect that first Ace Comics editor Fred Guardeneer quickly discovered the strip's obvious weaknesses and downplayed the strip, putting Flash Lighting on that first cover. I wonder also if Guardeneer didn't consider calling this first Ace comic book *Secret Agent X Comics*.

With *Sure-Fire #2*, the Phantom Fed feature shrank to a modest 10 pages and was moved to the back of the book—a sure sign of editorial abandonment. After that, his true fighting name is never again breathed. Nor is he otherwise identified. He's just X—more formally known as the Phantom of the F. B. I.—no relation to the Fantom of the Fair, another early comic book mystery man.

The Phantom Fed belonged to the ranks of early Golden Age quick-change artists like Cosmo, Phantom of Disguise (*Detective Comics*), Bill Everett's the Chameleon (*Target Comics*), Charles Biro's Presto Martin (*Silver Streak Comics*), Ted Parrish, Man of a Thousand Faces (*Speed Comics*), and the King (*Flash Comics*). If most of these names don't sound too familiar, there's a good reason. They were quickly eclipsed by more colorful—and therefore easier to illustrate and market—super-heroes. Even the prince of them all, The Phantom Detective, just couldn't cut it when offered up in the pages of *Thrilling Comics*. He lasted only two lackluster years.

Why Ace didn't just openly call their hero Secret Agent "X" and cash in on the name recognition of one of the most successful pulp heroes of the 1930s is beyond me. Maybe since they had crossed the line into comics, and were poaching on Secret Agent X-9's turf, they felt that in a legal battle with King Features, the were sure to lose. Raymond's X-9 had begun running in *Magic Comics* in 1939. I don't think the fact that Will Eisner's Black X had been running in *Smash Comics* since the previous year had anything to do with it. Or it could have been since they cancelled *Secret Agent "X"* early in 1939, Ace thought readers had lost interest in the character. Why launch your first comic book title on the back of a has-been, even if he did enjoy a five-year pulp run?

Maybe there was some kind of curse of comics characters called X back then. When the Black Owl debuted in *Prize Comics* #1 in March 1940 he was at first called K, the Unknown. It's a name that makes no sense. However X, the Unknown does makes sense. If you study that origin story, you'll quickly discover that all through that tale, K has been re-lettered—even the K emblem on his super-heroic chest. Well, if you've got to turn the letter X into something else in a rush, cropping it into a K is the quickest fix.

Similarly over in *Hit Comics* that same year, X-5, Super Agent was hastily renamed G-5, Super Agent after four adventures. *Hit* also featured Neon, the Unknown so there were a lot of comics creators thinking along the same spooky lines back in 1940. And a lot of legal letters flying back and forth, too. How else would you explain all this abrupt name-changing?

In any case, Ace played up the super-heroic Flash (soon renamed Lash when *Flash Comics* complained) Lightning instead, expanding his stories to 15 pages. Ultimately, he took over the book. *Sure-Fire* was re-titled *Lightning Comics* with the issue misnumbered #4—it's really #5.

A final Phantom Fed story carried over into the revitalized book. When they

I WONDER IF IT COULD HAVE BEEN SOME OF THIS STRAW THAT I FOUND IN THE BANK
LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN I PULL THIS
THIS ELEVATOR GOES DOWN TO THE CELLAR. FIRST BARN I EVER SAW WITH A CELLAR. NOTHING DOWN HERE BUT A LOT OF STRAW
IT I CAN REACH THAT SMALL PILE OF STRAW, I CAN HIDE AND LISTEN TO THEIR CONVERSATION

adapted *Claws of the Corpse Cult* in the previous issue, they were drawing from the shorter novelettes that marked the series' final years. Shorter stories were logically more adaptable. But were they better?

This new effort opens with a gang of crooks stealing two newly-developed U.S. Army "super-speed armored cars." The first thing they do is kidnap Center City's commissioner of police and go on a bank-robbing spree. When X discovers the police commissioner trussed up, he decides to swap clothes and impersonate him. Taking over Police HQ, the Phantom Fed brazenly orders a dragnet cast for the stolen super-cars. His tactic backfires after the robbers pull off a successful bank heist, shedding bullets and hand grenades—incidentally leaving the cops in the dust. Then the real commissioner barges in, flanked by angry cops, to reclaim his desk. It could be that by this time, the cops are on to X's trick of disguising himself as a high police official—although this is a different police commissioner than the one in "The Terror Trust."

After X manages to escape via a trick cigar that generates an impenetrable smokescreen, he briefly goes snooping as a reporter, with Betty Dale in tow, and then is forced to assume the disguise of a humble hobo in order to pick up the trail once more.

"Your disguises are wonderful, X," Betty Dale gushes after yet another startling transformation.

"A little grease paint and putty makes a lot of difference," the Fed agrees.

This is a long way from Batman and his Batarang, or Captain America and his mighty shield, although X does some nice Batman-style deducing by tracing some clues—a bank examiner found with his face obliterated by acid and a clump of straw—to the farm of a bank vice president, where one of the stolen vehicles lies hidden under a haystack.

This last untitled story is a puzzle. While it follows the opening chapters of the third "X" novel, *The Death-Torch Terror,* the terrible death-dealing flamethrowers are missing, replaced by invulnerable armored cars. Since the villain's name has been changed, and the storyline squeezed down to the point of unrecognizability, it's not a true adaptation. The author may have used the novel simply as a springboard, creating his own original development. There's also a suggestion of *Legion in the Living Dead,* but that may be coincidental. Secret Agent "X" fought a lot of bank robbers. I suppose the obvious failure in adapting *Claws of the Corpse Cult* compelled Ace to reconsider mining the later novelettes.

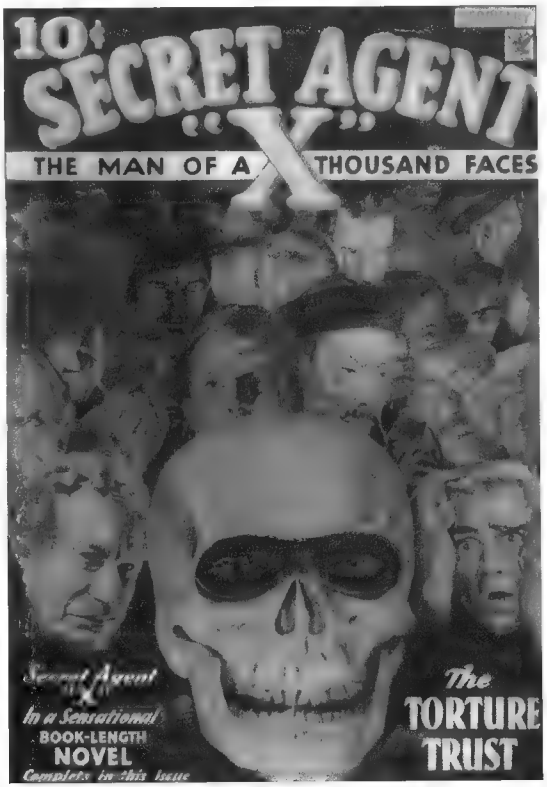
When Robert Turner finally stepped down from his editorial position to go freelance, he prevailed upon the Ace powers-that-were to drop the clumsy and impractical device of adapting old pulp stories. This concluding tale may mark the beginning of that shift. It also marked yet another new artist—George Appel, a Chesler studios veteran who was the inaugural Vulcan artist in Ace's *Super-Mystery Comics.* He also drew Duke O'Dowd, the Human Meteor for *Champion Comics,* and was best known for *Planet Comics'* Star Pirate.

By issue #5, the Phantom Fed was gone. It was probably too much work to keep squeezing 90 page pulp novels into 10 tepid pages, and hardly worth the bother to concoct new adventures for a faceless hero few noticed back then and no one remembers today.

Or maybe pulp publisher Popular Publications complained. Since 1939, they had been featuring the exploits of a mystery G-Man called GX in *Ace G-Men.* He was also called the Phantom Fed.

Maybe Ace should have stuck with the name Secret Agent X after all—

(Special thanks to Ron Goulart and Jon Berk for their research assistance.)



by Pat Calhoun

The Silver Phantom

The most sophisticated comic novels of the early Silver Age hailed from a publisher known mostly for "little kid" titles: the publisher was Harvey and the novels their Phantom newspaper strip packagings. While it is fine to argue the relative merits of newspaper strips and comic books, the successful packaging of a months long strip novel into comic book form represents a best-of-both-worlds combination that's often underappreciated as it's passed off (somewhat erroneously) as merely a reprint. A better term would be "first book publication," also used to describe the packaging of magazine novels (especially serials) into book form.

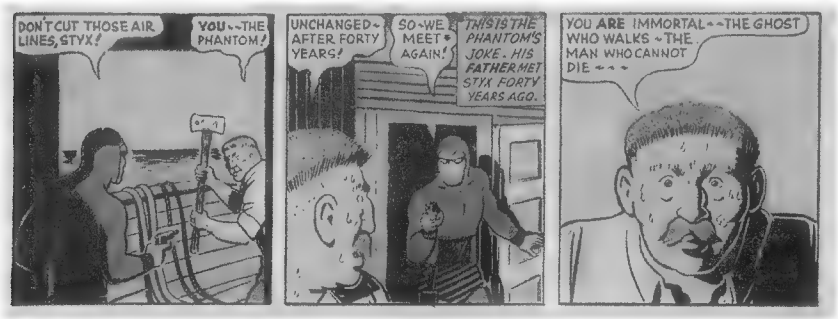
Harvey acquired the character after David McKay stopped publishing the Phantom in 1949 and completely left comics in 1951. But they only produced two issues in the early 1950s, as part of their *Harvey Comics Hits* series where each issue was devoted to a single rotating character. Perhaps Harvey felt that since the market was weak for heroes at that time (but strong for everything else!) caution was advised, but two were far too few. And these, *Harvey Comics Hits* #51 (Oct 1951) and #56 (Apr 1952), were subtitled "Weird Jungle Fantasy"—in hopes of luring some of the legions of horror fans their way.

Both issues feature two novelettes each. "Curse of the Phantom's Treasure" in #51 is good and shows how the Phantom keeps the peace among tribes of hostile natives. This issue also has a one-page comics origin on the inside front cover and a text page pushing the fact that the Phantom is a realistic character rather than some fantasy superman on the inside back. Issue #56 combines some of the text and most of the comics origin on the inside front with a house ad for *Teenage Dope Slaves* on the inside back cover. Both back covers feature the same Phantom pin-up.

A new rotating character title was launched, *Harvey Hits*, with #1 dated September 1957, and the first issue "revived" the Phantom. Many of the *Harvey Hits* Phantom covers were drawn by super-pro Joe Simon, but even though there have been many attributions of art by his partner, Jack Kirby, in the series, most if not all of them result from Simon using his S-and-K art files. The splash panel for this issue may or may not have any real Kirby work, but is the only original splash for the series, the others being taken from story panels. The "Little White Goddess" novelette ran a bit short so in the back of the book is a five-page *MAD*-style Sheena satire "Shirl the Jungle Girl," with fun art by Howard Nostrand. While many of the other issues have one or two single-page fillers at the end this is the only sizable back-up strip in the series. Even though Sheena comics were long gone she had a popular TV series in 1957 which likely inspired this "Harvey Hits Parade of Laughs" entry.

The Phantom books were part of Harvey's new line of "adventure comics," as Simon called them. Joe and Jack had been doing post-Code fantasy for Harvey's *Black Cat Mystery* since 1956, and at the same time as this first *Harvey Hits* issue they added two new titles, *Alarming Tales* and *Man In Black* (all #1 Sep 1957). Simon and Kirby had also debuted Challengers of the Unknown in DC's *Showcase* #6 (Jan-Feb 1957), a seminal event in the Silver Age. So these Phantom books really can be seen as an attempt to make a play in the new costumed-hero market with packagings of a great newspaper strip.

The Phantom returned in *HH* #6 (Feb


DON'T CUT THOSE AIR LINES, STYX!
YOU--THE PHANTOM!
UNCHANGED-AFTER FORTY YEARS!
SO-WE MEET AGAIN!
THIS IS THE PHANTOM'S JOKE-HIS FATHER MET STYX FORTY YEARS AGO.
YOU ARE IMMORTAL--THE GHOST WHO WALKS-THE MAN WHO CANNOT DIE---
BUT MIKE, STYX'S SON, ISN'T SO IMPRESSED--

Harvey Hits #48 The Phantom (Sep 1961). It's funny how often one comes across a "last issue" with great characters, cover, format, stories and art that makes you wonder why it had to be the last issue.

1958). "Curse of the Sunken Treasure" is a wonderful 19-pager, which makes a good time to mention the strip credits of Lee Falk (creator of the "Ghost Who Walks") as writer and Wilson McCoy as artist. Some might judge McCoy's art as static, but the poised panels are nicely staged and rendered in a pleasing style. This issue does have a two-pager in the back, the curious "Masterpiece," a Nazi concentration camp vignette reminiscent of the EC classic "Master Race."

In *Harvey Hits* #12 (Aug 1958) "The Scarlet Sorceress" seems to be an older tale as the art looks to be by Ray Moore, the original artist who preceded McCoy. Three issues later (#15 Dec 1958) came "Rescue in Crocodile Lair" a solid story of jungle skullduggery.

It was almost a year before *Harvey Hits* #26 hit the stands (Nov 1959). "The Wild Girl" is a full 23-page novel full of romantic charm that culminates in a cat fight between Dara, the circus animal trainer who turned to stenography when the show failed till she got so bored she fled to the jungle, and Diana Palmer, the Phantom's sweetheart. At this point Harvey was learning that superior stories and adult appeal were (sadly) no guarantee of success in the Silver Age. It was the SF-driven juvenile appeal of Green Lantern premiering in *Showcase* #22 (Sep-Oct 1959) and leading into the *JLA* that captured the fans.

The final three issues are all excellent. "The Lost Treasure" in #36 (Sep 1960) is a satisfying 20-pager, which left room for a page on "Famous Dogs of History" at the end. *HH* #44 (May 1961) is even better. "Hoodoo of the Pirate Ship" has a gang of crooks taking over a cruise liner with Diana and her mother aboard! With the help of strong rowers and a fast canoe (as shown on the handsome cover) the Phantom "swims in" to a delicate hostage situation. Twenty crackling pages and another dose of "Famous Dogs" for dessert!

The Phantom's final issue, *Harvey Hits* #48 (Sep 1961) featuring "Uranium Valley," is superlative in every way. The cover is great—with the Phantom a true ghost with see-through legs and his skull calling-card tied to a tree. The story is terrific as thugs take over a uranium mining town—jumping claims and driving their owners away. This 22-pager goes deep into the mythos: after the

MIKE SHAKES HIMSELF DIZZILY--
UH--WHAT A SOCK--!
THUS FATHER AND SON CARRY THE PHANTOM MARK--RECEIVED FROM FATHER AND SON!
NOW--YOU'VE GOT ONE, TOO!

In this great sequence (which includes info on Phantom genealogy for "irregular" strip readers) father and son crooks earn skull tattoos from the anything but ghostly punches of father and son "Ghosts Who Walk"(**HH** #6).

Nice shot of the entrance to "Skull Cave," the Phantom's underground lair, plus the splash for chapter one and the panel from near the story's end that supplied the figures used in the splash—a good example of the value-added packaging of strips into comic book (**HH** #36).

Phantom shows up the native workers tell tall tales about him to the crooks who are soon shaking in their boots as the Phantom bests them and spooks them at every turn. As for the art; well, it's the real McCoy.

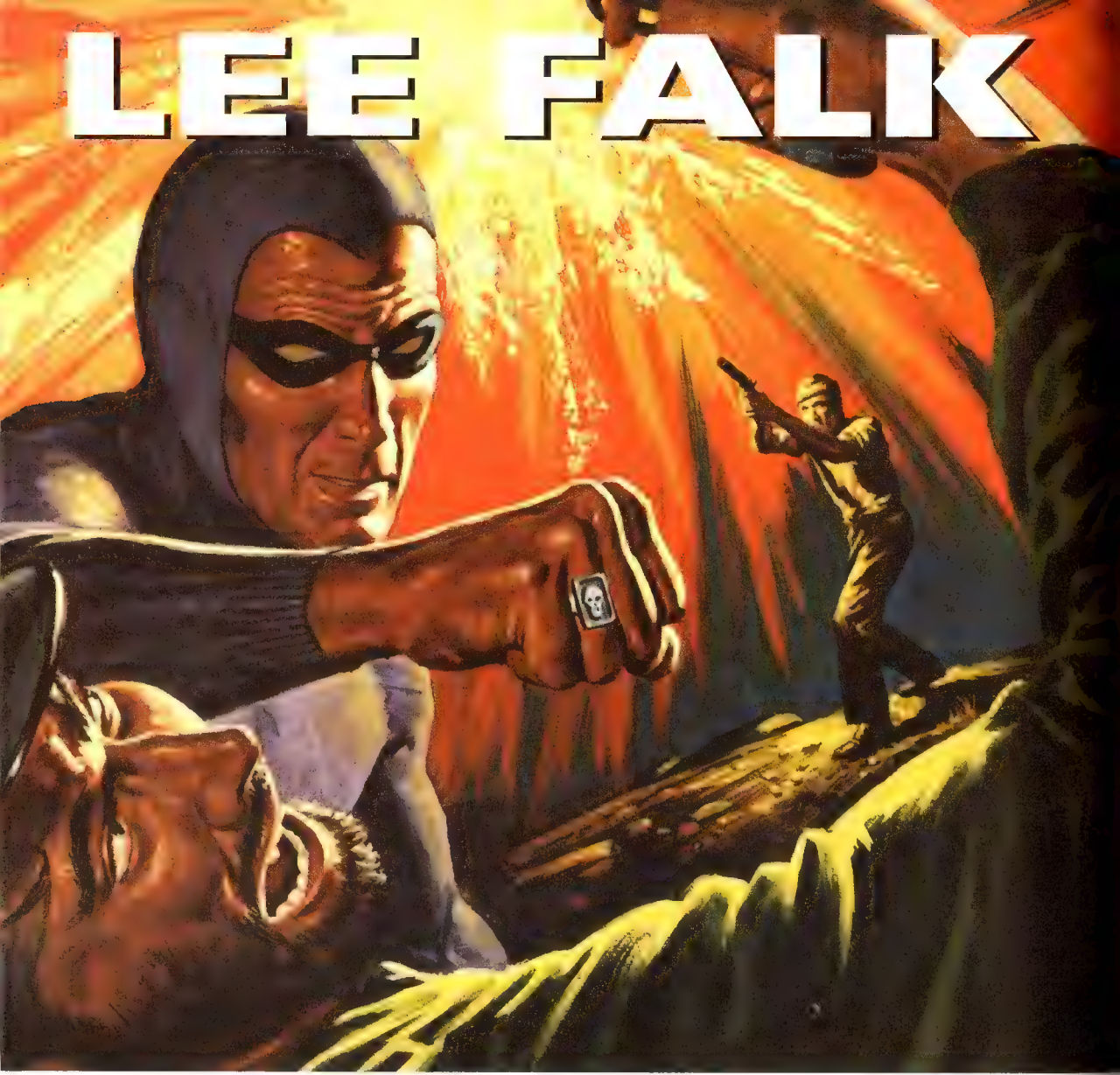
There's a perverse rightness to the series phasing out just as the ten-cent comic was breathing its last and two months before Marvel's *Fantastic Four* #1 hit the stands. Thus the eight Harvey Silver Phantom issues (along with their two Atomic Age precursors) occupy a unique place in comics history, a real ghost—of the era of newspaper adventure strips and comics as adult entertainment—that walked briefly and memorably along that last ridge beyond which lay the slippery slope into long-underwear fare sold in specialty shops.

GET HIM AWAY!
OUT THE WINDOW WITH HIM~THEN SHOOT THE VARMINT!
GET HIM?
THINK SO.
HE'S STILL BREATHING YOU'D THINK THAT BUCKET OF ORE WOULD HAVE KILLED HIM!
WOULD HAVE~THE DOG BARKED~HE DUCKED~IT BARELY HIT HIM~
GHOST WHO WALKS, EH? KNOCKED OUT LIKE ANY-BODY ELSE. GET OFF SOME OF HIS THINGS. HAVE A GOOD LOOK AT HIM.
WHAT'S HE GOT ON?

The Phantom's wolf-dog Devil really earns his kibble in this one. After the crooks KO the Phantom (in his civilian disguise) they take off his hat, glasses and overcoat only to be utterly confounded by the purple-garbed character revealed (**HH** #48).

ckwise) **Harvey Hits** #1 The Phantom (Sep 1957): There's no estion that the Phantom was part of a major Harvey Silver debuting the same month as two new fantasy titles, with art ector Joe Simon getting top talent like Al Williamson and Bob owell. **Harvey Hits** #6 The Phantom (Feb 1958): This second hantom issue features an excellent underwater cover and a uperb novella inside. Next month Harvey would premiere an SF ue, **Race For the Moon**. **Harvey Hits** #36 The Phantom (Sep 1960): A treasure tale with a twist, exploring the mythos of the Phantom identity passing from father to son. **Harvey Hits** #44 The Phantom (May 1961): Crooks who hijack a cruise liner regret it once the Phantom is aboard. At DC Green Arrow was joining the group in **Justice League of America** #4. Marvel was a month away from a new fantasy title, **Amazing Adventures**.

LEE FALK



by Will Murray

When Leon Falk died at the age of 88 in 1999, he had been simultaneously scripting two King Features adventure strips, *Mandrake the Magician* and *The Phantom*, since 1936—over 60 years.

A Missourian, Falk's writing career began early. He dabbled in writing poetry, theater plays and pulp stories. Lee Falk had no specific writing career goals when, on a lark, he wrote and drew his first strip. "I started *Mandrake* when I was a junior at the University of Illinois at age 19," he said. "Actually, I sketched the first Mandrake myself. I wasn't a very good artist. In fact, I was a bad artist. But I thought it was fun and drew up a Mandrake. I didn't think anything would happen with it."

FATHER OF SUPERHEROES

Encouraged by fellow Missourian Harry Tuthill, who did *The Bungle Family* strip, Falk approached King Features. "That summer I came east with my father and much to my amazement, *Mandrake* sold. And I suddenly found myself with a comic strip. Since I still had some schooling to do I found a very good experienced commercial artist in St. Louis who was a good deal older than myself, Phil Davis, and asked him if he would draw this while I was in college. And I would write it."

Mandrake the Magician debuted in 1934 on the same day as another soon-to-be-classic fantasy-adventure strip, *Flash Gordon*. "*Mandrake* came out of the early interest in stage magicians like Blackstone and Thurston and Cardini, who I adored," admitted Falk. "I'd seen them all as I grew up. Cardini was a very immaculate gentleman. He came out in full white tie and tails, top hat and cape, started doing marvelous card tricks, and made endless cigars and lighted cigarettes and pipes appear out of nowhere. I had this image of the magician as a very suave gentleman in a top hat.

"In addition to that, I had an interest in the great fictional detectives, Sherlock Holmes and Arsene Lupin; also an interest in the great adventures like Marco Polo. Mandrake

Lee Falk (photo © 1986 Anthony Tollin)

has been called an amateur detective, an adventurer, and a magician. The idea of making him a magician, adventurer, and detective was obviously an amalgam of all these boyhood interests.

"People have often told me that I looked like Mandrake," Falk admitted. "Well, of course I did because I was alone in a room with a mirror when I drew the first two weeks of the strip."

Mandrake was unlike any character that had appeared in those formative adventure strip days. "For the first six months or a year," explained Falk, "my concept of Mandrake was a super-person. When he gestured hypnotically at the ceiling, it would really fall down. I did this for a very short time because I began to feel that the suspense of it would lag if he were just impregnable, you know? I just became bored with it, and I felt that if I was bored, the readers would be too. So I gradually changed it without mentioning it in the strip. And so he was doing the same things, but they really didn't happen. It was hypnotism. And I think that was probably a wise choice, because it made him a real man and probably made the strip more durable. I think Mandrake wouldn't have lasted.... Well, there's Superman, but he's a more obvious hero. Superman seems to defy all

these rules. Mandrake is very popular, but yet fantasy is limited, as compared to a real hero like the Phantom."

The formal Mandrake was assisted by a semi-comical figure, a giant Negro named Lothar. "I don't know where he came from," Falk confessed. "Lothar started out as an African prince with his leopard skin and funny hat. He was a bodyguard for Mandrake. I think my original idea was to have Mandrake the intellectual and Lothar the physical. Lothar would solve everything with his fists and Mandrake with his intellect. That was the idea—the giant Lothar and the brainy Mandrake as a combination. At first Lothar was not civilized, and he spoke in a Pidgin English. I did a few stories where he was a prince of a federated tribe and would have been king of the whole thing, but preferred to deal with Mandrake because it was more fun."

In his way, Mandrake was as fantastic as Flash Gordon. He battled super villains from the very beginning. "The Cobra was the first," he remembered. "He was my very first story. I forgot all about the Cobra, frankly. I never think back about the stories. But when I visited France in 1966 they reprinted all these things. And suddenly I saw the Cobra. And then it all came back to me. I said, 'Well, that's great. I'll have to bring the Cobra back.' So he is back now. Still very much alive."

Phil Davis expected Falk to resume drawing *Mandrake* upon graduation, but that never hap-

Cover art for Lee Falk's paperback novels featuring The Phantom.

pened. King Features wanted another *Mandrake* out of Falk. "By the time I got out of school I had come up with another idea, which was *The Phantom*," Falk recalled. "Ray Moore was assisting Phil Davis in St. Louis. I asked Ray if he'd like to draw *The Phantom*. Again, I had sketched out what I wanted. So Ray tried it, and again they bought that."

Initially, Falk thought *The Phantom* would last a few weeks at best. To his surprise, it was a hit. Just as he had with *Mandrake*, he drew the sample strips, designing the earliest version of the Phantom's unusual costume, which lacked the trademark skull gun belt and striped trunks. "So then I decided that my inclinations were actually toward writing rather than drawing," he elaborated. "So I decided to stay with it. So when I was about 22, I had two strips going. And that was enough comic strips for me. I was also interested in the theater. There seemed to be a natural ecology between comic strips and theater, in that I made money in the comic strips and lost it in the theater."

Without realizing it, Falk had created an important figure in heroic literature.

"The Phantom was the first masked hero," he claimed. "As far as I know, Ray Moore set the style of the hero with the very marvelous physique. Lothar, as you know, was a physical specimen. But the Phantom set the type. He's one that's been copied after—I might as well say it—by all those, even Superman, which came a couple of years later. Superman went beyond in a very marvelous way to do his own thing. But still, it came from that. I always felt that Superman was probably a combination of both Mandrake and the Phantom because Mandrake was originally a superman when he started, in terms of what he could do. He wasn't just a stage hypnotist. He was a real magician. He used real

magic, you see. But there were many others thereafter. The Green Hornet. And Batman, of course. Captain Marvel and all those fellows—I'm not too familiar with them—followed the Phantom directly. The Phantom inspired a whole school of this kind of hero, which is now called the super-hero. It started with the Phantom. It's since proliferated."

Falk credited Moore with being a significant part of the feature's early success. "My first artist, Ray Moore, was a sort of bohemian, really a brilliant artist," he recalled. "Ray used to draw very big, about five times as big. He'd sort of slap it in in dry brush, ink and so forth. And correct with white paint. It had an awful sloppy look, but when it was reduced, it was beautiful. His stuff is simply marvelous. His girls are very sexy, his men are strong. He gave the Phantom an air of mystery, as well as strength, that none of the others have ever quite reached."

Originally, *The Phantom* was an urban detective strip, not an adventure story. "I worked that out very soon," reminisced Falk. "The first few months he was Jimmy Wells, a very attractive playboy, in love with Diana who liked him as a friend and a brother. But she was in love with a mysterious masked man who appeared out of nowhere to help her during her first troubles. Of course, it was Jimmy, but I didn't go to the trouble to reveal this. I've met people who read the strip then and they had guessed that Jimmy was the Phantom. Later on, I began to change the whole concept as I became intrigued with the whole mythical notion about the 400 years and 20 generations of Phantoms in the jungle. The more I got into that, I kept adding to this background, and I still do."

This was the pivotal point of the Phantom saga. Abruptly, Falk abandoned Jimmy Wells and embroiled the Phantom and lady explorer Diana Palmer with a vicious pirate band named the Singh Brotherhood. With that, the strip shifts to the South Seas, where the true history of the Phantom is revealed. Back in 1525, Singh pirates captured a merchant vessel near India, slaughtering Captain Standish and his crew. The only survivor, his son, swore an oath on the skull of his father to devote his life to stamping out the Singh. He became the first Phantom, and every eldest son since took up the mask and costume of the Ghost who Walks, creating the illusion of an immortal being dedicated to eradicating evil.

"I think it gradually developed at first," Falk explained. "But the more I did with it, the more intrigued I became with it. I kept adding to it. I included more background, including stories about his grandfather, or his great-grandfather, and stories dealing with the 17th century Phantoms. Then I began to tie the Phantom mythos with great historical events, like the father of the first Phantom, who was the cabin boy for Columbus. I had a whole story about how he and an Indian boy actually came to the North American continent and saw the Mayans and the Aztecs and so on. I've had stories about a 17th century Phantom who conquered a whole pirate city run by a pirate named Redbeard. He conquered Redbeard and his followers, tamed them and made them into the first Jungle Patrol. The Phantom is the unknown secret commander. The reason for this is that it was founded 250 years

Back cover pinup art for Gold Key's *The Phantom* #7.

ago by a Phantom, who was about the seventh Phantom, who was known as the Seventh."

The first Phantom was originally named Christopher Standish. Falk later ignored that name, immortalizing him as Kit Walker.

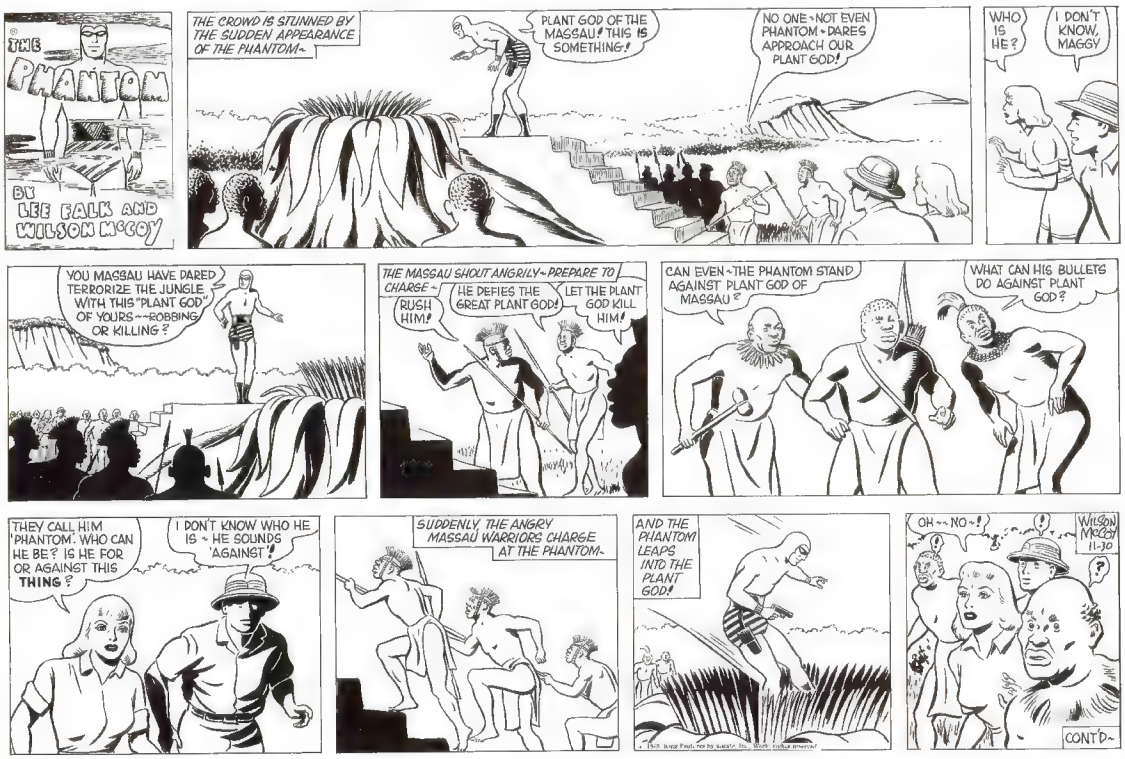
"All firstborn males are called Kit," explained Falk, "the Walker was just from the Ghost who Walks. I didn't want to identify him by any particular name. He is sort of multinational. The Phantom men through 20 generations have married women from every part of the earth, including the islands of the Pacific, and various Asian, African, South American, Western Europe and Mediterranean countries. The son is always sent to the country of the mother for education."

Where the 20th Century Phantom was supposed to be the 16th in the line, he's now the 21st, and the founding of the line is now said to date back to February 17, 1536—400 years to the day before the strip's debut. Falk chronicled the definitive history in his 1972 novel, *The Story of the Phantom*.

The origins of the Ghost who Walks go back to Falk's childhood, and back into the mists of mythology. "The Phantom came out of my boyhood interest in the gods and heroes of Greece and Rome, and the Scandinavian heroes, plus

Original color drawing of The Phantom by artist Wilson McCoy. BELOW: *The Phantom* Sunday Comic Strip, dated 11-30-58. Art by Wilson McCoy .

Robin Hood. Also, my interest in Tarzan. He's been called a modern Tarzan. I adored Kipling's *Jungle Books*. I've named the Phantom's special crowd, the pygmies who live in the Deep


THE PHANTOM
BY LEE FALK AND WILSON McCOY
THE CROWD IS STUNNED BY THE SUDDEN APPEARANCE OF THE PHANTOM~
PLANT GOD OF THE MASSAU! THIS IS SOMETHING!
NO ONE~NOT EVEN PHANTOM~DARES APPROACH OUR PLANT GOD!
WHO IS HE?
I DON'T KNOW, MAGGY
YOU MASSAU HAVE DARED TERRORIZE THE JUNGLE WITH THIS "PLANT GOD" OF YOURS~~ROBBING OR KILLING?
THE MASSAU SHOUT ANGRILY~PREPARE TO CHARGE~
RUSH HIM!
HE DEFIES THE GREAT PLANT GOD!
LET THE PLANT GOD KILL HIM!
CAN EVEN~THE PHANTOM STAND AGAINST PLANT GOD OF MASSAU?
WHAT CAN HIS BULLETS DO AGAINST PLANT GOD?
THEY CALL HIM 'PHANTOM'. WHO CAN HE BE? IS HE FOR OR AGAINST THIS THING?
I DON'T KNOW WHO HE IS~HE SOUNDS 'AGAINST'!
SUDDENLY THE ANGRY MASSAU WARRIORS CHARGE AT THE PHANTOM~
AND THE PHANTOM LEAPS INTO THE PLANT GOD!
OH~~NO~!
WILSON McCOY 11-30
CONT'D~

Lee Falk (photo ©2004 Adrienne Roy)

Woods with him, the Bandar. I took that from Kipling's Bandarlon, the monkey tribes that Mowgli is associated with. I purposely chose that as sort of a commemoration of Kipling."

The origin of the Phantom's then-unique costume has been the source of considerable speculation and confusion. Since the character predates Superman by two years, it's thought that both were inspired by the same classic circus trapeze-artist costuming that was the model for Superman's colorful uniform. "They remind me more of the Robin Hood type," Falk corrected. "I think of Robin Hood in green, and he also wore tights. Those were the pictures I grew up with."

Interviewed at the time the 1996 Phantom film was released, Falk gave a slightly different but not truly contradictory explanation. "I don't know," he mused. "It was an odd concept. Sort of a masked, hooded figure, like a medieval executioner. But he's not an executioner. He's a good guy. I thought of him as a jungle man."

At first, Falk saw his character as a ghost in gray. He was stunned when the now-familiar Phantom tights were mis-colored by an unknown King Features' colorist when the first Sunday strip debuted in 1939. "I think in scenes," he explained. "I had this image of a guy climbing over roof tops, the mystery man, and later on through the jungle, in tights. But I never thought of the tights as being purple. I thought of them as gray. They put out a color page, and the tights were purple. They didn't consult me. They just made it purple, much to my amazement. I would have changed it to a camouflage color like green. But it was out, and I didn't change it. In Europe, the Phantom is red. They were surprised to see him in purple in America. When they first got the mats and proofs for the Phantom, they were black and white and they didn't know what colors to use. The printer had lots of red, so they made them red. Which is absurd, having a man run through the jungle in red. Both colors are no good, really. They can't imagine him in purple over there."

Once he moved to the jungle, The Phantom became a stern jungle lord, like a masked Tarzan. "I have changed that in the last 10 or 15 years," Falk said in 1972. "I deemphasized that because I didn't like it. My personal feelings have changed. The Phantom is no longer the ruler of the jungle. His title is 'Keeper of the Peace' in the jungle. He was a friend of the people. He is a one-man United Nations, trying to keep the peace. To reemphasize this, I had the Phantom become an emissary for the United Nations. And Diana became a nurse for the United Nations."

Just as he continually fine-tuned the Phantom legend over the

decades, Falk has updated his milieu. Originally, he operated near the Indian subcontinent on a mythical island called Bengali. "I've never made the locale specific," Falk explained in 1972, "but most people assume that it is Africa. I felt the Phantom isn't actually in Africa. He is, yet he isn't. It's his own continent, really. It's Afrasian where he is. There have been stories in India, and I didn't want to place him too close to anywhere. So we have this place called Bengali. Then I changed it after all that trouble last year to Bangalla, and I never identified it because this is a jungle that looks very much like Africa, but then a thousand miles inland there are the mountain princes and they looked very Asian, Indian or Arab. They are 15th century type lords who still live like the 15th century in their castles."

Similar modern modifications crept into *Mandrake*. "Gradually the situation began to change and Lothar started to speak good English," related Falk. "I began to put him in civilized clothes because they felt the time had come. It looked kind of silly having him running around in sandals and skins. No one told me to do it. I had no pressure. It was my own feeling about it. I just got tired of it the way it was and wanted to update Lothar into a modern guy. We have him in a sport shirt and his English is good. Lothar always was smart even when he spoke Pidgin English. But he developed a lot."

MANDRAKE THE MAGICIAN
BY LEE FALK & PHIL DAVIS
MANDRAKE AND LOTHAR MEET A PROFESSOR THEOBOLD, WHO TELLS THEM OF HIS DISCOVERY OF A NEW WORLD— THE "X" DIMENSION!
THEOBOLD HAD PROJECTED HIS DAUGHTER, FRAN, INTO THE "X" DIMENSION. SINCE HE CANNOT BRING HER BACK, HE THINKS SHE'S HELD THERE BY AN UNKNOWN, HOSTILE FORCE.
MANDRAKE AND LOTHAR VOLUNTEER TO ENTER THE "X" DIMENSION TO SEARCH FOR FRAN. PROF. THEOBOLD PROJECTS THEM FROM HIS CHAMBER—
LOTHAR, WE'RE HERE! ANOTHER DIMENSION! A WORLD ENTIRELY DIFFERENT FROM OUR OWN!
WELL— ANYHOW, IT DIDN'T HURT.
LOOK, MASTER, IN SKY! FIRE! WHAT IS?
MAYBE IT'S THE SUN, LOTHAR. IN THIS NEW DIMENSION, ALL FAMILIAR THINGS WILL LOOK DIFFERENT.
SOMEONE — COME.
SOMEONE — OR SOMETHING. LET'S HIDE HERE FOR A MOMENT, SO WE DON'T SCARE IT AWAY.
THE FIGURE COMES CLOSER. IT IS STRANGE, UNEARTHLY, UNBELIEVABLE!
9-13
A MAN OF THE "X" DIMENSION! UNCANNY! HE SEEMS TO BE MADE OF LIVING, ANIMATED, METAL— INSTEAD OF FLESH! THOSE WHEELS ARE PART OF HIM!
HIM IS MACHINE — LIKE AUTO.
NO, LOTHAR— A MAN! IN OUR WORLD, WHEELS DO NOT EXIST IN NATURE. THEY ARE MAN-MADE! HERE, NATURE HAS CREATED WHEELS AND LIVING METAL!
NEXT WEEK— THE WHEEL MAN —

Comic Strip Art for *Mandrake the Magician* Sunday dated 9-13-36, art by Phil Davis.

Early readers of *The Phantom*, themselves fledgling cartoonists, embraced the idea of an updated hero in tights. "The Phantom started in New York in 1936 in the *Journal American*," noted Falk. "These guys all read it, and within two years they had started direct copies, and then gradually developed their own thing. And then others copied them, and then the whole super-hero school began. Batman was an imitation of the Phantom. The Bat Cave versus the Skull Cave. It was a direct imitation. The Shadow was the rich playboy, and Batman took that direction. He is a playboy, you see. He could not have copied the character of the Phantom more closely than if he had taken it out and pasted it in the strip, I think. Of course, as these things develop, different writers gradually work out their own stuff."

Falk points to characters derived from the Ghost Who Walks who don't seem obviously inspired by him. "The Spirit was a send-up of the Phantom," he claimed "I remember years ago Will Eisner told me with some embarrassment that he thought I'd be angry at him."

Some scholars see prior influences on Falk. The French pulp hero, Fantomas, for example. "I didn't know about Fantomas in those days. I've heard about it since. But the Phantom, I was never too satisfied with the title originally,

because there was a Phantom of the Opera and it wasn't an original thing like Mandrake. I tried to find another name for him. I was going to call him the Gray Ghost and this and that, but I never got one that I liked. In the strip I call him things like the Ghost Who Walks, and occasionally other names. But I never could find a better name. So I let it go."

The early Jimmy Wells Phantom smacks of pulp heroes like The Shadow, who posed as millionaire Lamont Cranston, and the hero of *The Phantom Detective* pulp magazine, Richard Curtis Van Loan, also known as The Phantom. Falk shrugs off any pulp influence as indirect. "It's possible," he allowed, "but I am not that familiar with them. I knew there were such things as *The Shadow* and *The Phantom Detective*. I don't think I've ever read them. The only pulps I read in the old days were science-fiction. The old *Amazing Stories*. I liked *Weird Tales* too. I used to read Lovecraft and those writers, you know. Of course I loved to read Edgar Rice Burroughs, not only his Tarzan, but Mars stories. He was a real original, and an interesting man. His attack on the established church on Mars was rather interesting."

Mandrake was also widely copied. The most infamous clone was Fred Guardineer's Zatara the Magician from early *Action Comics*. "Actually I didn't pay much attention to it," said Falk. "I didn't read comic books. Zatara, as I recall, I think we had to sue them originally. Because what they seemed to do was just cut out our stuff and paste it up and just put boots on Mandrake. They didn't even cut the balloons out. He had a large Indian servant who was very close to Lothar. They later dropped that and they gave him a mustache and top hat and everything. They had Ibis the Invincible and Chandu—many, many who had so-called real magical powers, so maybe that was one of the things that was a staying factor in *Mandrake*."

Some researchers wonder how much an influence radio's Chandu the Magician had on Falk. Sorcerer Frank Chandler, AKA Chandu, was aided by a woman named Princess Nadji, in contrast to Mandrake's lady friend, Princess Narda. "I recall seeing the old Bela Lugosi films when I was young," Falk once admitted. "But I can't remember anything about it. He was on radio, an Oriental magician. There were a lot of Oriental magicians. Mandrake, as far as I know, was the first fictional Caucasian magician."

Female assistants were typical of the old-time stage magician, of course. Falk claimed a company whose initials were N.A.R.D.A. inspired the name. But his exposure to the world of magicians and their assistants predated Chandu's 1932 radio debut. As a boy of 9, Falk participated in Thurston's famed levitation act when he was called out of the audience. "He asked us to assist," he recalled. "A little girl stood on one side of the table and I stood on the other. And his assistant, a very beautiful woman, lay down and he covered her with a sheet. All that stuck out was her hair ribbon and on the other end a little Turkish slipper on her foot. Then Thurston made her rise into the air. When she was about 4 feet in the air, Thurston asked me to take hold of the shoe, and the little girl to take hold of the hair ribbon. Thurston did his passes and grabbed hold of the sheet. And the woman had vanished. And we were holding the shoe and the hair ribbon. Of course this made quite an impression, since I was standing right there. I think this first kindled my interest in magic."

The popularity of the Phantom ultimately caught up to Mandrake, then eclipsed him. "Perhaps *The Phantom* is more widely read than *Mandrake* because he is a better hero," suggested Falk. "He is simple, straightforward—a colorful hero, a real man, but a hero. Whereas *Mandrake* appeals to the more imaginative readers. It takes a better imagination. I feel whenever you write fantasy, you lose half of your readers anyhow, and *Mandrake* is mostly fantasy. For that reason it has always been more difficult to write *Mandrake*. Every *Mandrake* story is a new gimmicky idea. It has to be very special. Otherwise, it becomes boring. He needs very special opposition and situations because he is a very special man. Actually, to me these characters have taken on their own reality over the years. They are a lot more

Cover art for Gold Key's *The Phantom* #4.

real to me than people I knew 20 years ago. They are very much around and are three-dimensional people. It is impossible for me to write a story for The Phantom that would also be suitable for Mandrake. They are so completely different. For the Phantom, it's the same way. I can't do a story for him that won't work. Because *he* won't do it."

Unlike Mandrake, who battled super villains and science-fictional foes, the Ghost Who Walks stuck with modern-day pirates and similar adventure-hero opponents. "The Phantom has always been a crime fighter, whereas other crime fighters are city-bred fellows who are fighting gangs," observed Falk. "The Phantom is different. He occasionally comes to town and will fight a real, Mafia-type of gang, but for the most part his gangs are sort of worldwide organizations. In fact, the recent gangs I've had the Phantom involved with were gangs that go back 400 years. They're ancient gangs that the Phantom has been fighting for years. There's one called the Vultures, whose specialty is to loot areas after national disasters—earthquakes, fires, floods. During wartime, they'd go on to the battlefield and rob the bodies and terrorize the refugees. This goes back 300 years. And the Phantom has always been on the edge of this gang, getting them, caught. He's an ancient enemy, you see.

"I had another gang like that called the Hydra, where the Phantom would knock off one of their heads—their headquarters in other words—but another one would spring up. Again, through the ages. I like that kind of story. Again, the myth quality of historical continuity, because the Phantom has this kind of continuity."

Less mythic criminal organizations go back to the early days of the strip. "There were the Marshal sisters," Falk recalled. "They were very audacious. They pursued the Phantom and hogtied him and dragged him into various places. Being a gentleman, he was always at a disadvantage because he couldn't slug them or shoot them, except try to use his wits to overcome them. One of my favorites is called the Sky Band, which was an all-female gang of sky pilots who attacked by air and so forth. The Phantom breaks this up with some difficulty because the gang is all women, and the Phantom can't hit

KING FEATURES SYNDICATE
The Phantom
By Lee Falk and Sy Barry
WHO-- IS IT? SHOOT -- ASK LATER!
BEFORE THEY CAN PULL THE TRIGGERS-- THREE PHANTOM BULLETS BLEND ALMOST INTO ONE SHOT!
THAT'S THAT. GET ON THE FLOOR, ALL OF YOU, OR I'LL DROP YOU THERE!
?!
WOW, WHAT SHOOTING!
I'M THE "PAL" THEY TALKED ABOUT-- YOU'VE NEVER SEEN ME BEFORE, STACY.
WHO ARE THEY?
A LONG STORY. YOUR STORY'S SHORTER. YOU WENT DIVING FOR OLD SPANISH TREASURE! INSTEAD--
--FOUND A MODERN GANGSTER DUMPING GROUND FOR MURDER VICTIMS, CORRECT, BOSS?
Gulp..!!
I CALLED EARLIER. HAVE YOU SENT A POLICE BOAT TO DEADMAN'S POINT?
KOOK, STOP BOTHERING US!
THE POLICE DON'T BELIEVE ME. YOU TRY.
I'M STACY, THE DIVER YOU'VE BEEN LOOKING FOR.
I FOUND THIS GANGSTERS' GRAVEYARD AT THE SEA-BOTTOM NEAR DEADMAN'S POINT--
KNOCK IT OFF, YOU'RE ALL DRUNK OR KOOKY!!
THEY DON'T BELIEVE ME...
WE'LL CONVINCE THEM.
??
UP YOU THUGS. PICK UP YOUR BUDDIES. WE'RE MOVING!

***The Phantom* comic strip circa 1967, art by Sy Barry.**

This Harvey Comic Hits issue of *Mandrake* from 1951 obviously lifted EC's *Weird Fantasy* logo.

them on the jaw. But he uses his wits and overcomes them. Another which I particularly like, the Golden Arrow, is a female gang of jewel pirates. The Phantom gets mixed up with them, but again he is under a slight handicap. In the course of this there were always a few of the women who are taken with him, and compete for him because he is a very attractive male. I've had that pattern in several stories."

But there was only one love in the Phantom's life—Diana Palmer. "Poor Diana, the perpetual fiancée, she never gets tired of waiting for the Phantom, but her mother urges her on. I used to use that now and then, but now I feel after all these years, Diana is no longer vulnerable to outside romances. She is now faithful to the Phantom, as she always has been."

They finally wed in 1977, later producing twins, Kit and Heloise, heirs to the Phantom line. "I do a lot about ancestors in the Phantom," Falk said. "I do a thing called Parents Day when all the jungle honors the parents, and grandparents, and great grandparents, and also the dead. It's kind of a comment on the youth cult and how the old people are being shoved on the shelf in present-day America. Out in the jungle, it's different. They honor their old people."

Falk wasn't above tweaking the mythos. "At one point there was a female Phantom, which turned out to be one of his great great great great aunts, you see. I started a female because I liked the idea of the way she would look in the tights. She looked great, you know. Sexy. And it was a nice story for awhile."

The sheer inventiveness of the ever-evolving strip triggers endless questions about the origins of his concepts. Falk just shrugged them off. "So where did the Phantom's ring come from? Where did the Phantom's costume come from? These pictures pop into your mind. Sometimes the wilder the picture, the better the story. The Phantom ring—I've no idea. I don't know where that came from. In fact, I have two rings now. The skull ring, and then later on I created the other ring. I call it the Good Mark. That means you're under his protection. I don't know where that came from, it just came. He left his mark. I originally had it that he was there—like Kilroy was here. It seems to me that way back some criminal used to leave his mark that he was there, sort of bragging. And that may have given me that notion. You know you don't have an origin for everything. Something just pops into your mind."

Like the name Mandrake, for instance. "Mandrake's name comes from the mandrake root," explained Falk, "which in the medieval pharmacopeias was a magical root shaped like a man. When it was pulled up, it would scream, and it had magical powers of fertility. I first saw this word in John Donne's poem, 'Goe and catche a falling starre and get with child the mandrake root.' I was fascinated with that poem and with the word Mandrake and looked it up. Of course the Latin of it is *mandragora*. And the name I think was very fortuitous. I wanted something that went with magician, and Mandrake the Magician went very well. It's usable in every language I think except Africaans, where they don't use Mandrake. *Mandrake* runs under the name *Valter the Wunderman*. While *The Phantom* is sometimes called *Phantasma* or *Maderaska*, different names. In Africaans, it is called *Skaap*, which I suppose means Phantom."

Over the years, Falk enjoyed a more-or-less free hand while working for King

Features. "We used to have some funny old taboos in the old days. When Hearst was our chief, as he was called, he had a couple of things he didn't like, and snakes were one of them. You simply could not have a snake in the comic strip. You could have dragons and monsters, but no snakes. Drugs were completely verboten. I'm talking about the '40s and '50s. Kidnapping was verboten after a few sensational kidnappings had occurred. The things like that, outside the obvious things. The old rule used to be to avoid sex, politics and religion."

Originally, Falk collaborated closely with his fellow Missouri artists. Over the years, that changed. "For a long time, I lived in the East and both my artists lived in the Middle West. For example, with Davis I didn't see him for 15 years. I just corresponded and now and then we'd talk on the phone. It wasn't really that kind of collaboration. I'd just send them the script, and that was all there was to it. They would just go about their business. It worked, evidently, without my getting in their hair or their getting in mine."

Unfortunately, Moore went into the Army Air Force during World War II and tragedy struck. "Ray was a pilot during the war, and he had some kind of accident on the field," recalled Falk. "He told me he was hit with a propeller. He wound up with a trifacial neuralgia, also known as a tic doulourreux. It affects the side of the face and is very painful, one of the most painful things you can endure. At that time, he simply couldn't draw. Wilson McCoy, who was a pal of his, actually replaced him when he went away to war. Then Ray came back and tried to do it, and couldn't. Wilson came back again and continued it."

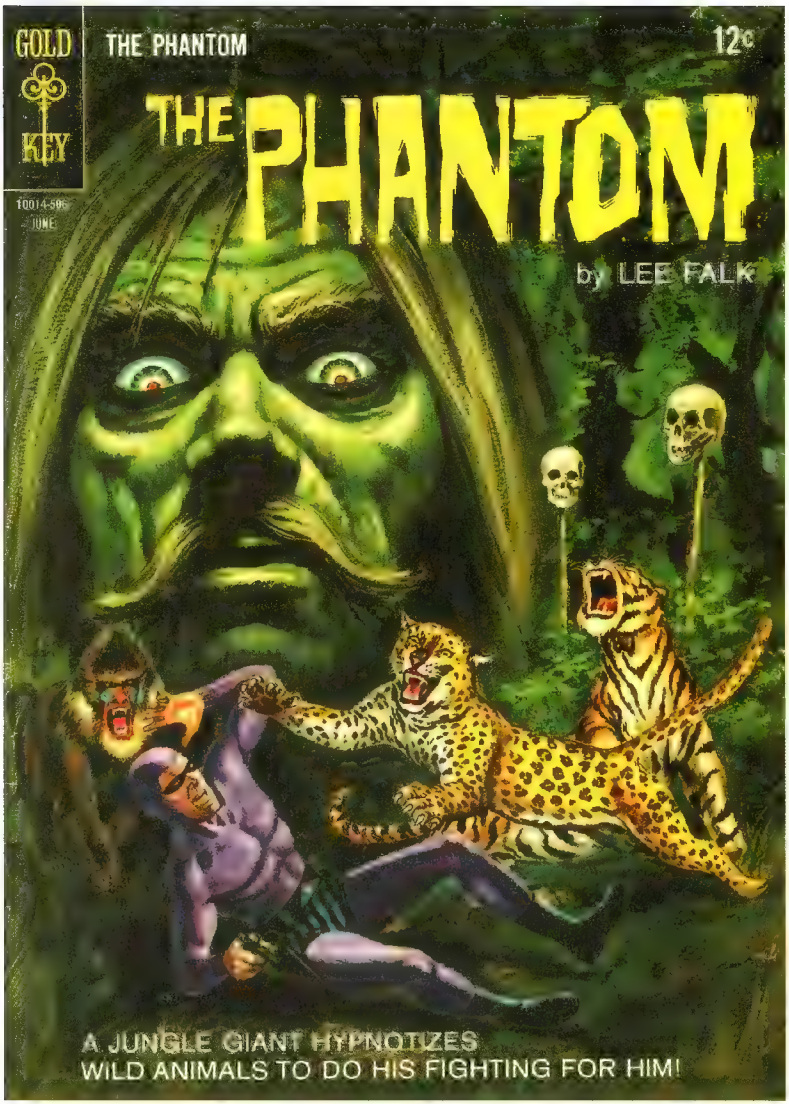
After his return, Moore focused on the Sunday page only, but was forced to retire in 1947. "I thought Moore was marvelous," recalled Falk. "He was excellent on the Phantom, very original and very good. Ray hated to draw anything like automobiles, or bicycles. He'd just sort of knock them off. He was a fine artist in terms of interest in fine art, and it was a chore for him to do this. I mean, it was hard because of the monotony of doing the same thing every week, whereas other types of artists quite enjoyed having the thing set so that they don't have to freelance or submit drawings to agencies for approval, which is the lot of the freelance artist. I think that temperament means durability in this field. The kind of people who rage and torment about week after week the same thing don't last."

Falk was less pleased with McCoy's long stint on *The Phantom*. "Many of the comic aficionados I meet in Europe like McCoy's work," he said candidly. "They grew up with it and it's what they're used to. I liked Mac personally. He was a very interesting man and a hard worker, but I felt his drawing style was childish. His Phantom kept getting shorter and shorter and ended up looking like a high school halfback instead of a jungle lord. His character lacked the heroic proportions of Ray Moore's Phantom."

Lee Falk outlived most of the artists with whom he worked. In 1961, Wilson McCoy died and was replaced by Sy Barry, who drew the Phantom over the next 33 years. With Phil Davis's death in 1964, his former assistant and wife Martha, carried on for two years until Fred Fredericks took

REX KING'S STORY BEGINS WHEN HE IS LEFT ON A MISSIONARY'S DOORSTEP--
A BABY!
POOR LAD, NO ONE KNOWS WHO YOU ARE. YOU HAVE NO NAME.
BUT YOU'RE AS PROUD AND COOL AS A TINY KING. I NAME YOU REX KING-- TWICE A KING!
NOW IO--APPLE OF THE PHANTOM'S EYE--
REX KING!
WHAT'S HE SAYING?
SHH, TOM-TOM. I CAN'T HEAR.
WE LLONGO NEED THE PHANTOM'S HELP. OUR LAND IS INVADED BY A CARAVAN OF HEAVILY ARMED HUNTERS
"THEY SHOOT EVERYTHING THAT MOVES."
"PITS AND TRAPS IN THE WOODS, BREAKING THE PHANTOM LAW OF OUR ANIMAL PRESERVE."
WHEN THE PHANTOM RETURNS, HE WILL BE TOLD.
TOM-TOM, MAYBE WE CAN FIND THOSE BAD HUNTERS!
DON'T BE A SISSY, TOM-TOM. LET'S FIND THE BAD HUNTERS!
UNCLE WALKER WOULD NOT LIKE IT.
"FOR THE GHOST WHO WALKS."
TOM-TOM SPEAKS SENSE. THESE HUNTERS ARE NOT YOUR AFFAIR. PROMISE YOU WILL NOT SEEK THEM.
I PROMISE, GURAN.
REX'S ENORMOUS PET, JOOMBA!
LET'S TAKE A WALK, JOOMBA!
YOU PROMISED, REX!
I'M JUST GOING FOR A RIDE!
WHO KNOWS WHAT I MIGHT SEE!
CONT'D.

***The Phantom* comic strip 1967, art by Sy Barry.**



over Mandrake.

"Of course, I started so young and these were all older men," Falk said wistfully. "I guess I'm partial to the men I started with. Davis was marvelous. He was an excellent artist. I think he is a little slighted when they talk about artists in histories. They talk about Alex Raymond and Hal Foster—whom I knew very well—and I admire them enormously. I think that I perhaps prefer Raymond above all of them. He was the best in his field. I think Davis was right along with Raymond. He was just as imaginative as Raymond. I used to give him very weird stuff to draw. You know, creatures. I used to utilize a lot of science-fiction. In fact, I think *Mandrake* is the only comics strip that's ever gone into real science-fiction, exclusive of space opera."

Falk recalled a story about Davis and Raymond that sounds apocryphal, but isn't. "All artists use what they call swipes," he explains, "big files where they have photos of tanks and airplanes because when you tell an artist to draw a tank, he doesn't just draw a tank or a machine-gun, he has to have a model to work from. And they use each other's work. So I was standing there with Phil Davis one day by the drawing board on Mandrake, and I had a thing in *Mandrake* for some rearing horses and he had a cutout from *Flash Gordon* of rearing horses. He wasn't tracing it or anything. He was using it for a model because it was beautifully drawn. So a year later I moved to New York and I was visiting Alex Raymond in his studio. I looked at his board. And he's doing some rearing horses and he's got Mandrake cut out on his board and he's using that as a model. I said, 'Alex, for God's sake, we took that from you!' He said, 'You did!' And he roared with laughter. Isn't that funny?"

Having dabbled in art himself, Lee Falk took an artist's viewpoint to the problems of comic strip storytelling. "I think in terms of pictures," he stated. "I was looking at the full moon one night, and I suddenly thought of a head looking over the moon at you. The head would be about the size of a golf ball on top of a volley ball. And I started to figure out how big he would be."

Out of this came the fantastic idea of an 800 mile high alien, exiled to the moon, and too big to come to Earth without wreaking havoc, and too kind to risk it. As the idea played out in Falk's mind, it grew and grew. What if the giant were thirsty? What if he needed Earth's water to survive? What if, to complicate matters, a huge meteorite was headed toward New York City, capable of destroying North America?

"So I wrote a story about this for *Mandrake*," related Falk. "Mandrake gets wound up with him through telepathy. This meteorite is coming toward the Earth. And they're trying to

send rockets out to break it up. So Mandrake gives this guy some water. Lets him sip and lowers the Atlantic Ocean by about a half inch—saves his life. So as this thing comes hurtling through space, he catches it like a baseball and hurls it into the sun. He saves the Earth, you see. It makes a beautiful picture."

Over the years, Falk saw his characters adapted for comic books and film. The results, he confessed, usually disappointed him. "They made a Mandrake serial and a Phantom serial. As it happened, I had nothing to do with the serials. They just got the rights and did them. This was during the war. I was either in the Army or Washington at the Office of War Information, where I worked for a couple of years. I went to a projection room and saw about five minutes of the Phantom. This fellow came out in long underwear that was very wrinkled. They didn't have stretch cloth in those days. I thought it looked terrible. I turned around and walked out. I never saw another one. It was awful.

"Tom Tyler was a good actor," Falk admits. "But they were very cheap. They were shot in Los Angeles Park and very badly done. The stories weren't too bad. I've got the whole set. But now watching them, you can see a streetcar go by! They forgot to cut it out."

Columbia filmed a second Phantom serial, but the rights had lapsed before it was completed. Mixing stock footage of Tom Tyler with new scenes featuring actor John Hart, the serial was released in 1955 as *The Adventures of Captain Africa*. Even though it faithfully adapted his "Fire Princess" storyline, Falk once confessed. "I know nothing about that. I never heard of it. That's interesting.

"And then I saw about five minutes of *Mandrake* the same way," he continued. "Warren Hull played him, a good actor. But I remember instead of having a black Lothar, they had a short Egyptian. They didn't want to have a black in those days, you see. Again they both looked like they had been made in telephone booths. No production values. Republic had done a fair job with people like Captain Marvel, but Columbia apparently had a very skimpy budget. In their costumes, the Batman and the Phantom are very dreary."

Near the end of his life, that all changed. In 1996, Paramount released a big-budget version of *The Phantom*, starring Billy Zane. "I worked with Jeffrey Boem doing the script," Falk said in 1996. "They were very decent and wanted my input right from the beginning, which was unusual. In the past, they never did. On this one they really did—casting, everything."

Paramount also went to the earliest source material. "My first big story in *The Phantom* was about the Singh Pirates," Falk explained. "Jeffery Boem went into those old stories to get characters, the Singh Pirates, the bad girl with the heart of gold, Sala, the whole ending and so forth, from my scripts. He brought in a new story, which was very good, based on these things."

During his lifetime, Lee Falk had seen the newspaper comic strip cycle from humor or adventure and back again, coming full circle. Through it all, his work persevered. *Mandrake* was relegated to European papers, while *The Phantom* evolved into the most popular adventure strip of all time. He was philosophical about it all. "Most of the old adventure strips have been dropped," he observed. "The few that have lasted, *Mandrake* and *The Phantom*, seem to have survived. There have been cycles of this, you know. It's like the old laugh-a-day strips in the '30s and '40s began to go out of papers, and only a few of them survived—the best ones. Now in the '50s *Beetle Bailey*, and then later on *Peanuts*, *Wizard of Id*, *B.C.*, all those—a whole new generation of laugh-a-day things which are really more popular. And they sell much easier. The laugh-a-day things from the old days, the ones that survived, *Blondie*, *Barney Google*, are few. So many have gone by the wayside. Now we see the same thing happening, a cyclical thing, of adventure strips being replaced by laugh-a-day strips."

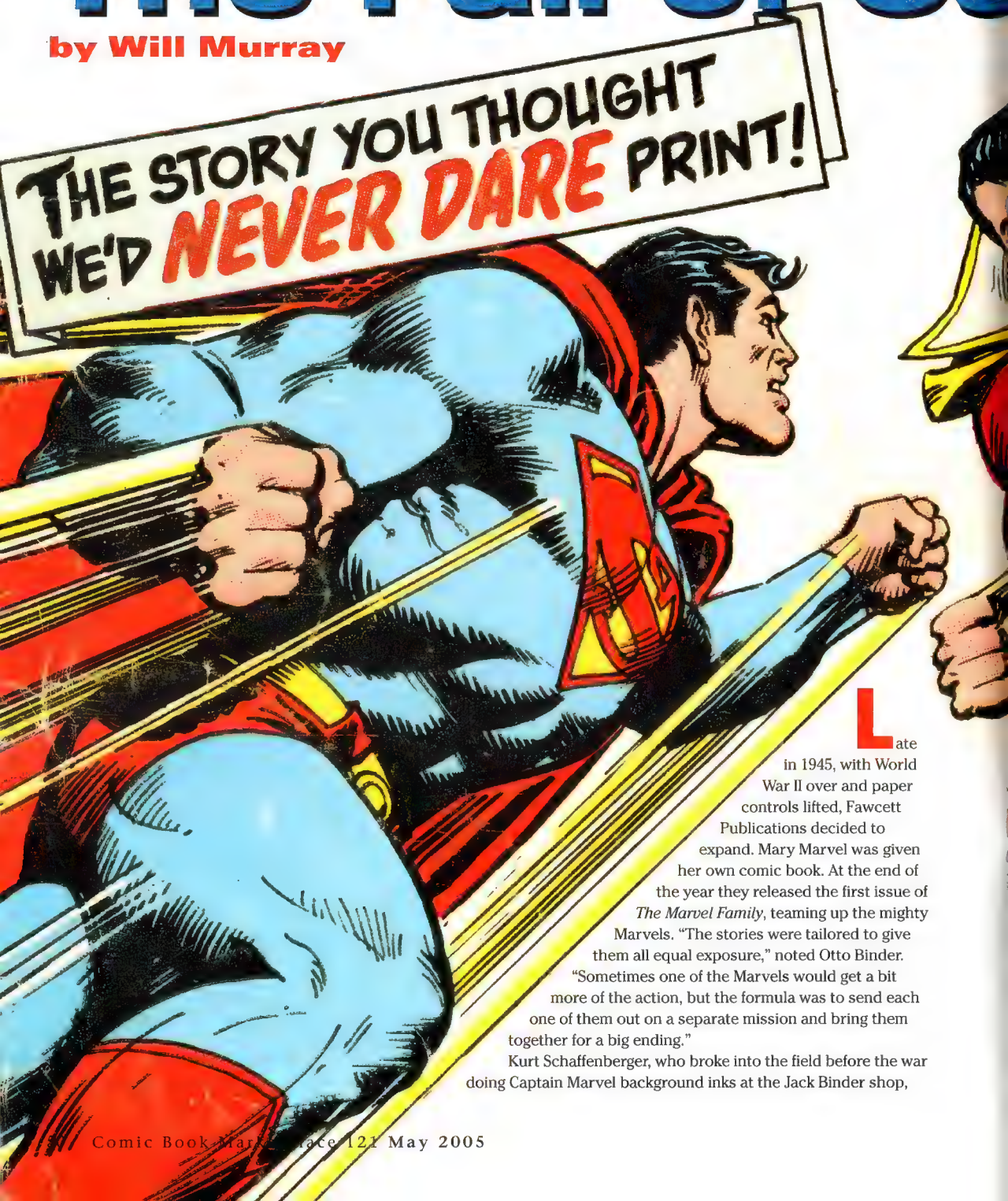
As for the secret of his dual success, Lee Falk thought he understood it.

"My stuff translates very simply because it's not American in background, or necessarily in temperament," he concludes. "They're international strips. The Phantom is not even an American, you see. Mandrake, maybe or maybe not. I don't know. I've never really decided what he is. The Phantom certainly isn't. He's multi-cultured. That original ancestor was English, of course. All countries have their own myths and heroes. The Phantom is like that. He's a straight hero who gets into the kinds of situations heroes deal in. They can identify with him, even though he is in an odd costume. The other thing is that the Phantom's oath to fight against piracy, cruelty and injustice has been taken very seriously in parts of the world where such things do exist."

Grateful appreciation is made to Robert Porfirio for permission to quote from his unpublished 1972 interview with Lee Falk, and to Anthony Tollin for supporting quotes.

The Fall of Ca

by Will Murray



Late in 1945, with World War II over and paper controls lifted, Fawcett Publications decided to expand. Mary Marvel was given her own comic book. At the end of the year they released the first issue of *The Marvel Family*, teaming up the mighty Marvels. "The stories were tailored to give them all equal exposure," noted Otto Binder. "Sometimes one of the Marvels would get a bit more of the action, but the formula was to send each one of them out on a separate mission and bring them together for a big ending."

Kurt Schaffenberger, who broke into the field before the war doing Captain Marvel background inks at the Jack Binder shop,

ptain Marvel

returned from wartime service to take on the new *Marvel Family* title. "When I took over the Marvel Family stories I drew Captain Marvel himself as much like Beck's version as I could but I also did my own thing with the stories I illustrated," he said. "By the time I started doing Captain Marvel, Jr., several other artists had already had a whack at him, and [Mac] Raboy's style was a thing of the past. What I did was try to adapt him so that he would fit in with the Captain Marvel and Mary Marvel style of art, as they were now all appearing together in *Marvel Family*."

Meanwhile, a constellation of supporting characters had also grown up around Billy Batson. "He worked at Station WHIZ, where his boss was kindly old Sterling Morris," Beck recounted. "His friends were Beautia, Sivana's beautiful but dumb daughter, his landlords Pa and Ma Potter, Dexter Knox who lives next door, Mr. Tawny the talking tiger who worked in a museum, and Steamboat, Billy's servant."

A creation of Ed Herron, Steamboat was eased out of the series in 1945. "Steamboat was created to capture the affection of negro readers," explained Beck. "Unfortunately he offended them instead and was unceremoniously killed off after a delegation of blacks visited the editor's office protesting because he was a servant, because he had huge lips and kinky hair and because he spoke in a dialect. He was always a cartoon character, not intended to be realistic at all, but he was taken seriously by some, sadly enough."

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Editorial Director Will Lieberson recalled Steamboat's end differently. "The decision to remove Steamboat was completely my own," he admitted. "I always found the character objectionable and when I took over Rod Reed's position I exercised my prerogative as executive editor and ordered him out of all future scripts."

"We were always creating new side characters," observed Otto Binder, "most of which were just one-shots if they turned out to have no appeal."

Captain Marvel himself was never given a first name, but in the January 1945 *Whiz*, "Captain Marvel Gets a First Name," He experiments with several, at one point calling himself Marvin Milton Marvel! This humorous approach, everyone agreed, was one of the keys to the feature's enormous popularity.

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Rod Reed, who briefly edited Captain Marvel, inaugurated in *Captain Marvel Adventures* #31 a series of tales in which Captain Marvel visited readers' home cities.

"Actually, the Captain Marvel and Marvel Family stories aren't humor in the strictest sense but rather satire and parody of life situations and the doings and shortcomings of humans," recalled Binder. "It is often said that Captain Marvel's tone of his stories were 'whimsical,' a series of fantasies reflecting life through 'funny mirrors' like those at amusement parks. Their subject matter is recognizable but distorted by exaggeration, spoofing, or running jokes. The secret of it all was that Cap and Billy were dead serious and never made a joke at all. Despite the light humor and whimsy, Captain Marvel was pretty close to real life."

"Binder wrote biting satire and sardonic humor, disguised as jolly little adventure stories," observed Beck. "The biggest difference between Captain Marvel and other super-heroes was of course the fact that he was funny, while the others were stern, granite-faced characters with little warmth or human feeling about them…. Captain Marvel and Billy took turns rescuing each other from tight spots; when Captain Marvel was faced with a task for which he was too big and powerful, he changed to small, agile Billy, and vice versa."

Yet the unrelenting pressure to be prolific took a toll on Otto Binder. Writer Joe Millard remembered that, "Otto Binder once, in a fit of creative malaise, almost worried himself into a nervous breakdown over what happened to Billy Batson's pants after he changed into Captain Marvel!"

"Other writers followed Binder's lead," added Beck, "or even surpassed him at times. Bill Woolfolk wrote great supernatural stories. Manly Wade Wellman wrote science-fiction stories. Rod Reed wrote witty, fun-poking stories…. Had it not been for this group of writers, Fawcett would have killed off Billy Batson and they would have just made Captain Marvel a carbon copy of Superman. In fact, I think, there were one or two stories where he never even appeared."

Reed, who briefly edited Captain Marvel, inaugurated in *Captain Marvel Adventures* #31 a series of tales in which Captain Marvel visited readers' home cities. "I'm the one who thought up the city gimmick and persuaded the brass it would be a circulation builder," Reed noted. "I wrote the prototype story, which was about Buffalo, New York. No research was necessary, as I had been a newspaperman there."

Scripter Robert Kanigher also claimed the inspiration as his. "What I did was have Captain Marvel meet the distributor of comics on each location, in each story," he related. "I had him send a photo of himself. The artist drew him, and I mentioned the distributor by name. At my request, he sent in photos of all the well-known streets, buildings, monuments, stadiums, speedways, landmarks, which the artist drew as I fit them into the story. Naturally, with his name and face in the Captain Marvel tale, the distributor bought great quantities of the book."

World War II had transformed the stories in ways that displeased C. C. Beck. "Our publisher, correctly figuring that the hysteria of the second World War would make Nazi, Fascist and Nipponese villains popular," he asserted, "made us introduce not only the villains Captain Nazi and Nippo and other such fantastic creatures as opponents for Captain Marvel, but was actually happy when we showed Hitler, Mussolini and Hirohito—living people—in our comic pages. This should never have been done. It only made our readers feel confused and let down, and when they could see in their daily papers and hear on the radio that all three of these characters were still going strong in spite of what they had seen happen in our stories, they must have said to themselves, 'I think I'm being had!' None of these villains ever seemed to me to be very

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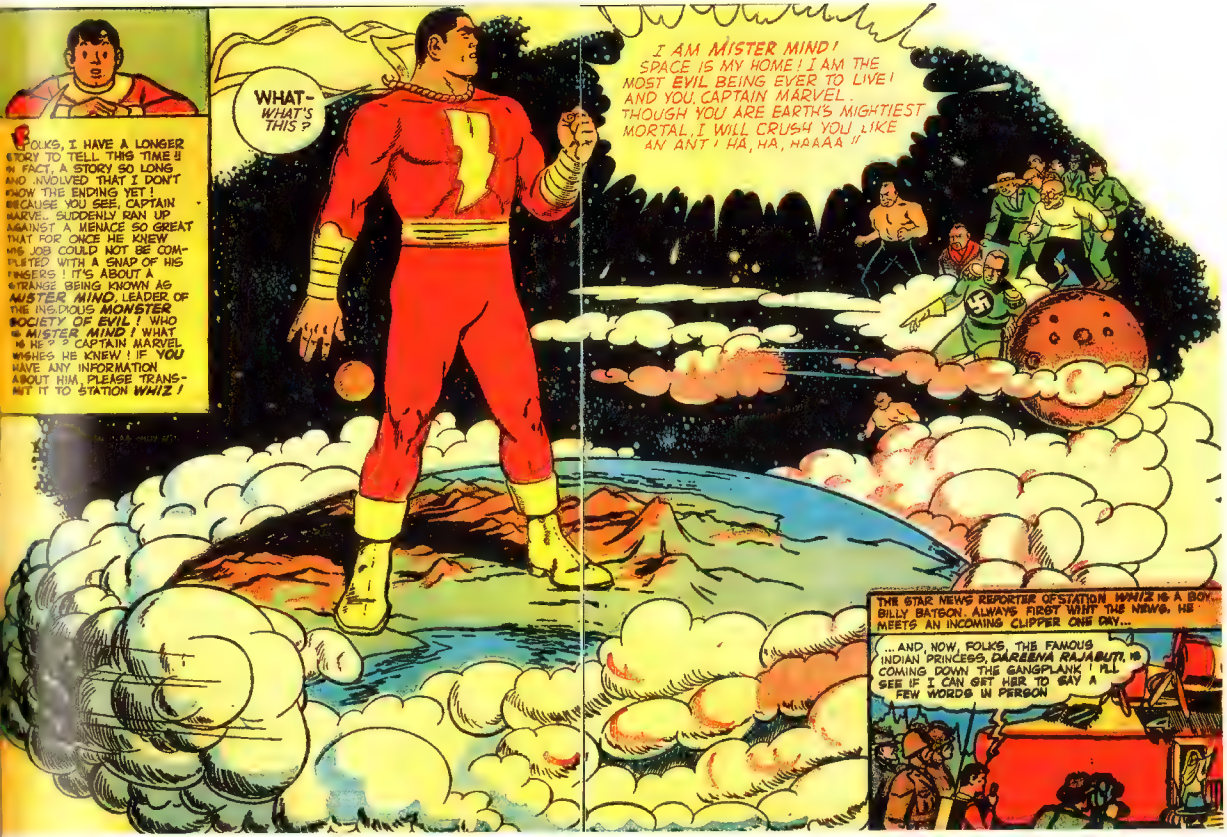

FOLKS, I HAVE A LONGER STORY TO TELL THIS TIME !! IN FACT, A STORY SO LONG AND INVOLVED THAT I DON'T KNOW THE ENDING YET ! BECAUSE YOU SEE, CAPTAIN MARVEL, SUDDENLY RAN UP AGAINST A MENACE SO GREAT THAT FOR ONCE HE KNEW HIS JOB COULD NOT BE COMPLETED WITH A SNAP OF HIS FINGERS ! IT'S ABOUT A STRANGE BEING KNOWN AS MISTER MIND, LEADER OF THE INSIDIOUS MONSTER SOCIETY OF EVIL ! WHO IS MISTER MIND ! WHAT IS HE ? ? CAPTAIN MARVEL WISHES HE KNEW ! IF YOU HAVE ANY INFORMATION ABOUT HIM, PLEASE TRANSMIT IT TO STATION WHIZ !
WHAT- WHAT'S THIS ?
I AM MISTER MIND ! SPACE IS MY HOME ! I AM THE MOST EVIL BEING EVER TO LIVE ! AND YOU, CAPTAIN MARVEL, THOUGH YOU ARE EARTH'S MIGHTIEST MORTAL, I WILL CRUSH YOU LIKE AN ANT ! HA, HA, HAAAA !!
THE STAR NEWS REPORTER OF STATION WHIZ IS A BOY... BILLY BATSON. ALWAYS FIRST WITH THE NEWS, HE MEETS AN INCOMING CLIPPER ONE DAY...
... AND, NOW, FOLKS, THE FAMOUS INDIAN PRINCESS, DAREENA RAJABUTI, IS COMING DOWN THE GANGPLANK ! I'LL SEE IF I CAN GET HER TO SAY A FEW WORDS IN PERSON

The tremendously popular 26-part serial, "The Monster Society of Evil," began in 1943, the year *Captain Marvel Adventures* began outselling Superman.

interesting or even worthy of taking up a reader's time."

Inexorably, the Big Red Cheese grew in power to Superman-like proportions. "Captain Marvel was always lifting up corners of Germany and pushing apart colliding galaxies and doing things like that," Beck snorted. "He had to fight Hitler's army, Hirohito's army, and fly and crash through steel walls and rip up fortifications and generally make a big, boring nuisance of himself."

Head office directives sometimes seemed calculated to derail the popular series. "The publisher also once wanted to drop Sivana, claiming the old rascal was becoming a more interesting character than Captain Marvel," Beck averred. "The editors paid no attention to so silly an order and kept him alive and cackling."

Over time, Sivana's extended family was introduced, including daughters Beautia, Georgia and Sivana Jr. "Sivana, to all of us at Fawcett," admitted Binder, "was almost 'real' as compared to the other dirty dastards the Marvel Family quashed; in fact, we often privately rooted for Sivana, wishing at times he could win a round with the Marvels licked at the end of the book. There was talk of this for a while—and *this* would have been a sensation—of giving the Sivanas their own book—namely, a comic featuring the *villains* rather than their opponent heroes. But, alas, publishers have a limited imagination and just could not accept this pretzeling of the traditional comics format."

But the World's Maddest Scientist did suffer from overuse, and so new villains were constantly being manufactured. The next most famous drove the roller-coaster events of a tremendously popular 26-part serial, "The Monster Society of Evil," which began in 1943, the year *Captain Marvel Adventures* began outselling *Superman*.

ON SALE EVERY OTHER FRIDAY
APRIL 13
Captain Marvel
ADVENTURES
10¢
NO. 58
ANOTHER ONE OF YOUR EVIL INVENTIONS, EH, SIVANA ?
NO, NO ! YOU'VE GOT ME ALL WRONG, CAPT. MARVEL ! I'M RE-WORKING ON A PEACE MACHINE !
CAPTAIN MARVEL vs. SIVANA

"A second great villain was Mr. Mind, the intelligent worm," noted Beck. "He was so small and powerless he had to get others to fight Captain Marvel for him."

"A second great villain was Mr. Mind, the intelligent worm," noted Beck. "He was so small and powerless he had to get others to fight Captain Marvel for him. Otto Binder wrote all the Mr. Mind stories, which ran as a serial for two years."

"Mr. Mind wasn't a worm," revealed Binder, "at least for the first half dozen chapters. The Captain Marvel brain-trust composed of Beck and myself got our heads together to figure out who or what Mr. Mind should be, after I invented him as a disembodied voice. We undoubtedly went through a hundred concepts, until somebody (and, frankly, in those skull sessions I have no idea who first thought of any particular gimmick)...somebody said, 'Why not take the most unusual thing we can think of? Not the traditional human or galactic villain, nor robot, not this or that of the routine masterminds, but just the goofiest of all things—maybe a worm!'"

Beck recalled, "I once suggested that instead of killing Mr. Mind off, we could have him turn into a beautiful butterfly and fly away, but that idea was killed by the editorial department. When Mr. Mind was finally killed off by electrocution in a specially-built worm-size electric chair, everyone felt bad, even Captain Marvel."

Another unusually popular supporting character was Mr. Tawny, the Talking Tiger, a joint creation of Binder and Beck. He first appeared in 1947.

Added Binder, "I won't exactly say tears were in our eyes that day we worked up the final chapter and executed Mr. Mind but, in all honesty, I think we all felt a loss of some kind. You can't write about any character for a length of time—worm or warm-blooded man—without a sense of sadness at 'killing him off.'"

Another unusually popular supporting character was Mr. Tawny, the Talking Tiger, a joint creation of Binder and Beck. He first appeared in 1947. "The only other Captain Marvel serial that approached Mr. Mind—and quite closely, as a matter of fact—was the Tawky Tawny Tiger non-serial succession of sequels," said Binder. "Response was also overwhelming for him. Because he had lent himself more to unorthodox concepts, it was Tawky that Beck and I chose as a possible syndicate newspaper strip."

Neither that, nor a 1943 attempt to syndicate Captain Marvel to newspapers succeeded. It was one of the few media realms the good captain failed to conquer. He never made it to radio, either.

THE NIGHT SET FOR MR. MIND'S EXECUTION ARRIVES.
BRING IN THE PRISONER!
HERE HE IS, WARDEN!
ALL IS LOST! THIS IS THE END!
THERE! HE'S STRAPPED FIRMLY!
...TWO SECONDS TO GO...
DAILY VOICE MR. MIND DIES TONIGHT AT ELEVEN
TICK! TICK!
LAMPS ALL OVER THE CITY GROW DIM AS THE SWITCH IS CLOSED AT THE PRISON, SENDING THOUSANDS OF VOLTS OF DEADLY CURRENT THROUGH THE EVIL MR. MIND'S BODY!
ELEVEN O'CLOCK! MR. MIND IS DEAD!
Later, MR. MIND IS STUFFED AND PLACED IN A MUSEUM!
WELL, THAT'S THE FINAL AND COMPLETE END OF MR. MIND! ONLY A LITTLE WORM, BUT HE HAD THE WHOLE WORLD WORRIED FOR TWO YEARS! THERE WERE TIMES WHEN CAPTAIN MARVEL THOUGHT HE'D NEVER GET HIM!
HELP WANTED!
FANS: THIS IS YOUR MAGAZINE AND WE NEED YOUR HELP IN MAKING IT AS GOOD AS POSSIBLE! WOULD YOU PLEASE ANSWER THE QUESTIONS BELOW, PASTE THE S.I.D. ON A PENNY POST CARD AND MAIL IT TO US AT 1501 BROADWAY, N.Y. 18, N.Y.
Thank You,
THE EDITORS.
YES NO
DO YOU LIKE MR. MIND?
ARE YOU SORRY TO SEE MR. MIND GONE?
DO YOU LIKE SERIALS?

"When Mr. Mind was finally killed off by electrocution in a specially-built worm-size electric chair, everyone felt bad, even Captain Marvel." said C.C. Beck.

The 1941 Republic serial starring Tom Tyler, *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*, had been a rousing success, though C. C. Beck abhorred it, and the liberties it took with his character.

Captain Marvel appears monthly in WHIZ COMICS

A beautifully illustrated premium from the serial *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*.

The 1941 Republic serial starring Tom Tyler, *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*, had been a rousing success, though C. C. Beck abhorred it, and the liberties it took with his character. "The first change Republic's adapters made was to turn Billy Batson into a naive 30-year-old man," complained Beck. "The second change was to have Captain Marvel, who was about 20 years old in his comic book form, played by a 40-year-old ex-cowboy actor and stuntman who ran around throwing heavy objects and shooting people with machine guns. Everything in the original Captain Marvel comic book stories was lost in translation."

It also stirred the ire of DC Comics. Republic made their Captain Marvel serial after failing to secure the rights to Superman. In fact, story elements previously announced for Republic's planned Superman serial were used in *The Adventures of Captain Marvel*. DC sued both Fawcett and Republic Studios.

"You know what their claim was?" Beck scoffed. "Their claim was that Captain Marvel was so much like Superman that the poor little kids were buying it by mistake, thinking that it was Superman. That all the money that Fawcett made rightfully belonged to DC. They wouldn't admit that kids were buying it because they preferred it. That they thought it was better."

Few remember that Captain Marvel's fate was presaged by that of another early Fawcett superhero, Master Man. Debuting in the first issue of *Master Comics* a month after Marvel's first appearance, he was in many respects a pale imitation of Captain Marvel—a weak boy who is given superpowers via a kindly doctor's vitamin formula, becoming the blond blue-suited Master Man. DC promptly sued him out of existence, as they had Fox's Wonder Man a year earlier.

For some reason, Captain Marvel proved resistant to the same fate. Well, he did get some of his powers from the invulnerable Achilles! Fawcett won the first round. "Fawcett's lawyers…showed Captain Marvel had flown before Superman had, that he had had a boy character in his stories before Superman had, and that everything used in Superman's stories had been used before in literature," recounted Beck. "Tarzan was running long before Superman was. Popeye did all the things that Superman did. The Phantom had been around for years. He wore a costume."

Beck suggested any surface similarities between the Man of Steel and the Big Red Cheese emerged from the common roots of folklore, not popular culture. "Captain Marvel and Superman were both based on ideas hundreds of years old," he insisted. "If Superman was Samson or Paul Bunyan in tights, Captain Marvel was Aladdin's genie, or Robin Hood's Little John, the genial giant who did the strong-arm work

"More blood-and-guts and horror…they wanted to switch over to that, and Otto and I didn't agree with them at all…That was a grotesque and futile joining," remarked William Woolfolk, "somewhat like grafting a gorilla's leg onto a normal human being." Captain Marvel's days were numbered.

that Robin Hood called on him to do."

Early on, Fawcett retooled Captain Marvel in a vain attempt to de-Supermanify him. The Big Red Cheese's short white cape was removed for a couple of 1941 issues of *Captain Marvel Adventures* and *Whiz*. Billy got a big "B" (then double-B) stitched on his red jersey. But these "improvements" were soon dispensed with.

"One thing I know," declared Rod Reed, "during the entire time I was with Fawcett, we never copied Superman. One time somebody had a character in a humor filler saying, 'Is it a boid? Is it a plane?' The top brass said this was a no-no and made us take it out. It was stressed that there should not be even a kidding reference to anything Supermanly." Otto Binder concurred. "This I can state categorically—not one story idea was ever lifted from Superman."

"I didn't have them on my desk," insisted Beck. "I never looked at them. There was no need to."

Fawcett kept publishing and DC continued pressing its legal case. "The court proceedings were frustrating, time-consuming, and costly," complained Fawcett Art Director Al Allard. "The lawsuits interfered greatly with our work."

Still, the Captain Marvel empire remained strong, thanks to the small army of talented writers and artists who toiled behind the scenes. "C. C. Beck called us the unknowns," noted Marc Sawzye. "Rod Reed had called us the forgotten ones. I am said to be the most forgotten of the unknowns, or the most unknown of the forgottens. Like the rest of the comic book people at the time I had no idea it would become the Golden Age."

"Our instance in the so-called Golden Age of comics was a period of time similar to the early movies," recalled Jack Binder. "No one knew what they were doing. We had to just take the bull by the horns and make this thing go! There were no guidelines set for us to go by. Fortunately, because of the thrill of just doing it and being involved in it, the comics worked."

All during the war, the draft absorbed staff, and new talent came in to fill the gap. Writer/artist Dave Berg was one. "C. C. knew he was going to lose more artists in the months to come," recounted Berg. "The demand for Captain Marvel stories was great, so C. C. worked out a mass production system. My arrangement was to write a script a night. The next morning, I would roughly pencil the story, which passed on to the letterer, and on to the next artist who tightened the penciling, then on to C.C. who drew Captain Marvel, Billy Batson, and other major characters, along with reworking any panels that needed it, and then on to the inkers. Beck was to oversee everything before it left our department."

Emilio Squeglio came in as a production artist. "We used

to drive Pete Costanza crazy," he joked. "When we knew he was coming in, we'd take our pages and do funny things to them. We'd put mustaches on the character, add belt buckles to Captain Marvel with funny sayings like 'Big Hero.' Sometimes we'd change Cap's boots, too—stuff like that. Now, we'd never do that when Beck was there. He was very strait-laced and wouldn't have appreciated it at all. He was a strict man—everything had to be right! Any time we had to draw a figure, it had to be done in the Beck style."

Beck's approach harkened back to a simpler time. "I treated my comic panels as views of a puppet show where heroes, villains and other characters came into view from the left, spoke their lines and then disappeared, to the left ft they were not to be used later, to the right if they were part of an ongoing story. When characters fought, they fought each other; when they talked, they faced each other; when they ran, they ran across the stage, not out of it and into the laps of the audience. This kind of presentation was in such contrast to the superhero comics of the time that it caught on immediately and made Captain Marvel the biggest-selling comics of the Golden Age. He was a comic-strip character, as plain and simple as Harold Teen, Daddy Warbucks or Offissa Pupp. He was not—I repeat, not—a superhero. In fact, he wasn't even the hero of the stories he appeared in."

Captain Marvel sales continued strong until the post-war period, when Superman regained his sales ascendancy. "Then the war ended," explained Beck. "Gone were the huge sales of comic books to soldiers and sailors everywhere and to children of war industry workers who had been making big wages. Out of uniform, young men and women had to find jobs; they had no time to sit around reading comic books any more.... As for the comic book heroes and heroines, they had nothing to do. They had become so humanized that they could no longer fly around, chase outlandish villains, or fight impossible monsters as they once had done; nobody believed in that old fairy tale stuff any more."

By 1949, *Captain Marvel Adventures* circulation had plunged to roughly half of its wartime peak. "Fawcett started cutting down our artwork," Beck noted. "Where one time our studios' rooms had been filled with artists grinding out comic pages, by the early '50s Pete [Costanza] and I were doing almost everything by ourselves again. The issues put out in those years contain some of the best Captain Marvel stories ever published, I believe. They were superbly written and edited, and the artwork, I can see now, was really fine."

Soon, the Beck and Costanza Studio was just C.C. Beck and a letterer. Sales were down. The superhero was on the wane. Horror was the big trend. Fawcett's western comics were eclipsing *Captain Marvel Adventures* in sales. So western-themed stories and horror villains like "The Mongol Blood-Drinkers" began to surface in *Captain Marvel Adventures,* by this time edited by Wendell Crowley.

"We seldom had arguments with Fawcett's editors until later when they wanted us artists to get into the swing of what most other comics were doing at the time," said Beck. "More blood-and-guts and horror...they wanted to switch over to that, and Otto and I didn't agree with them at all."

"That was a grotesque and futile joining," remarked William Woolfolk, "somewhat like grafting a gorilla's leg onto a normal human being."

Captain Marvel's days were numbered. Emilio Squeglio remembers a worried executive editor Will Lieberson "wandering around in a daze" while art director Al Allard told him frankly in 1947, "I don't know how long we're going to last."

This malaise didn't seem to affect Fawcett's chief artist. "I enjoyed it," Beck admitted, "although toward the end, it was no fun at all. The publisher wanted more violence, which was what everyone else was doing. We were glad when it quit."

"An injunction was ordered," recounted DC editor Jack Schiff, "forcing Fawcett to close down the Captain Marvel line. Damages per individual copied panel and instances of story plagiarism were awarded. The suit was settled for peanuts instead of the actual millions of dollars involved. Most damaging in the 1953 trial was the

testimony of two Fawcett employees that they had been ordered to copy Superman."

The pair was said to be scripter Manly Wade Wellman and disgruntled former editor Frances E. Herron. "Anyway," Binder later said of Herron, "apparently embittered, during the court battles with DC, he turned state's evidence over to DC that Captain Marvel was a direct copy of Superman, which may or may not have turned the case against the Fawcett's."

However, C. C. Beck remembered it differently. "There was one artist that worked for us, who was very poor and very clumsy and very slow, so we got rid of him, and he went to work for DC and turned against us and testified that he'd seen me with stacks of *Superman* comics on my desk. Which was enough to convince the judge."

Pete Costanza was also discovered to have copied one panel of a Superman strip, substituting the Big Red Cheese. "That killed us," admitted Roscoe Fawcett. "We settled out of court. We paid them $400,000. The settlement said that we do not admit to copying Superman but promised never to publish Captain Marvel ever again."

The climax came with the suddenness of a thunderclap. "I was cheerfully working on the next adventure when I got word to quit and send back everything I'd completed," said Beck. "Fawcett discontinued all comic production. Why? They never told me."

"I remember the day well!" remarked Kurt Schaffenberger. "I had picked up a new Marvel Family script from the editor the day before and had just finished penciling the first two pages when Wendell Crowley called me with the news. I was dismayed, to say the least."

Not everyone was shocked. "It didn't bother me a bit!" said Jack Binder. "I knew the end was near and I'd made arrangements to go into another line of business."

For brother Otto, who was writing for Fawcett exclusively, it was a catastrophe. He was in the middle of scripting "Seven Modern Wonders," the 3-part Marvel Family story Schaffenberger was simultaneously drawing, when he got the word to cease working.

"I really had a lot of fun doing the Captain Marvel stories," he related. "When it all ended it really took the sunshine out of my life for a long time.... I had quit DC because of the Fawcett/National lawsuit, so when National

In 1972, D.C. Comics revived Captain Marvel and C.C. Beck joined the publisher to provide the art. By Shazam #11, Beck became disenchanted with poor quality scripts and left the book.

finally won the suit, it came as a big blow to me and all the other artists and writers concerned. The thing that makes it even worse was that Beck and I had a syndicated Captain Marvel strip all worked out. He even did some artwork on it. I think we had about six or eight weeks of it done."

Wendell Crowley, Captain Marvel's beloved last editor, was said to be devastated.

The final issues of all Fawcett comic books appeared late in 1953.

"They lost," recalled Captain Marvel Jr. artist Sheldon Moldoff, "and when they lost it, they felt like they'd lost their big gun. A lot of the executives at Fawcett were never happy with the comic book section anyway. They really did not want to be in the comic book field. Comic books always had a stigma about them, and so they filtered out the comic book section."

"When the end came," grumbled Beck, "they let us go like so many factory workers. I had no contract, and they wouldn't let me see the circulation figures for fear I'd ask for a raise. The only way we knew Captain Marvel was booming was that we had to keep hiring more artists. We had between 35 and 40 at the height, all drawing Captain Marvel, like piece workers in a factory. We had no rights, got no money. I'm not bitter. I'm just telling the facts, because there's such a romantic idea about a cartoonist."

For 13 years, Captain Marvel had been one of the greatest superheroes of the era. But now he was going to sleep—not to be reawakened for a generation. Ironically, it was artist Jack Kirby, the man who drew *Special Edition* #1 back in 1940, who triggered the revival of Captain Marvel. Kirby was freelancing for DC Comics and suggested that they license the dormant character from Fawcett. The revival would be written by Kirby's assistant, Mark Evanier, and drawn by C.C. Beck, whose work Kirby loved, with Kirby himself editing.

DC liked the idea, but balked at using Evanier or Beck. Their plan was for Denny O'Neil to script with Bob Oskner drawing under Julius Schwartz's editorial direction. Eventually, the company became convinced by editor E. Nelson Bridwell that luring Captain Marvel's original artist out of retirement was the surest path to success.

In 1972, C.C. Beck returned to Captain Marvel. While the Big Red Cheese's sideburns had gotten a little longer and DC was his new publisher, not much had changed. At least, not in Beck's mind. "Besides," he said at the time, "the key to the success of the strip is not in Marvel, but Billy Batson. Billy is the main character who gets into all the jams. Marvel is there only to bail him out. We try to use Marvel as sparingly as possible—we always did. He doesn't jump around from one disaster to another, but pops up only when he is needed."

But Beck soon grew disenchanted with the revival, disappointed in the quality of scripts he was given to illustrate. "As an illustrator I could, in the old days, make a good story better by bringing it to life with drawings. But I couldn't bring the new stories to life no matter how hard I tried. They just lay there on the drawing board like corpses which I was making pretty for their final burial."

Beck was working on *Shazam!* #11 when he threw in the towel.

"The story that caused me to stop illustrating new Captain Marvel stories for DC was an impossible pile of garbage about some talking vegetables that had to land on Earth when their little flying saucer ran out of fuel. Captain Marvel had to do such idiotic things as carry them around in grocery shopping bags and, to avoid suspicion, pretend that he was catching a cold when one of the vegetables in the bag sneezed loudly."

To salvage the script, Beck suggested a fairy-tale "was it a dream?" ending. He was overruled. In frustration, he trashed his unfinished art pages. Ironically, Beck was replaced by Kurt Schaffenberger, who had drawn the Marvel Family back in the late '40s and '50s.

Invited to submit a script of his own, Beck offered "Captain Marvel Battles Evil Incarnate." When it was returned to him for illustrating, he discovered it had been completely rewritten. "All my plot, motivation and character development had been taken out and silly, senseless scenes of the Marvel Family flying about had been put in," he complained at the time.

Beck refused to draw the new version and that concluded his association with DC's *Shazam!* "I'm sure DC was quite happy when I quit, as they could now have everything their own way…" said Beck "I don't feel bad about being out of work but I do feel sorry for poor old Captain Marvel, who is now being once more put to death by the same people who put him out of business back in 1953."

To his dying day, C. C. Beck refused any credit for co-creating the World's Mightiest Mortal, and steadfastly denied the importance of Captain Marvel. "Bill Parker's great, original contribution to the comic world was the creation of Billy Batson, no helpless little tad who had to wait for a hero to come along and get him out of the trouble he was always getting into but a lad who could save himself by becoming the World's Mightiest Mortal when all seemed lost. Bill never received any credit for this, and today few people know he ever existed. I know *I* didn't create Billy Batson and Fawcett never wanted him in the first place, so to Bill Parker must go all the congratulations."

As for Beck himself, his iconoclastic remembrances of the World's Mightiest Mortal often confounded the fans who loved his Captain Marvel.

"The real secret behind the success of Captain Marvel, which few people recognized, was that Billy Batson *told* about Captain Marvel's exploits over his radio and television programs," he once wrote. "As far as anyone ever knew, Billy may have made up the stories he told over the air."

(Grateful acknowledgement is given to the innumerable interviewers from whose works this oral history has been constructed.)

Paul Ryan

Catching Up With a Master of the Medium

interview by John R. Stuart

Paul Ryan has had the pleasure to produce some iconic work in the comics industry for both Marvel and DC. He has worked on Superman, Batman, Spider-Man and most recently he's drawing the Phantom. I had the honor to meet Paul at the June comic convention in Toronto, and I found him to be gregarious, personable, a free spirit and a true gentleman.That meeting led to this interview, which was conducted via email in July and August 2004. This interview was final-edited by Paul Ryan.

Mainstream Work

John R. Stuart: You've been around the business for quite a while now, working for such industry giants as Marvel and DC as well as a variety of other comic book publishers. Let's spend some time catching up and quickly review what your major comic book accomplishments have been. Now, I realize that you have discussed your earlier days with Marvel and DC in other interviews, but I believe to really understand Paul Ryan we need to briefly cover your early days. So how and when did you break into the business?

Paul Ryan: In 1983 I was working for an Engineering Firm. A co-worker, also interested in comics, told me about Charlton Comics Bullseye Program. Charlton was publishing work by aspiring comics creators. I wrote and illustrated a story for them and it was accepted. Unfortunately, the Bullseye title was cancelled before my story saw print. Bill Pearson at Charlton sent all the leftover stories to Bill Black, Publisher of Americomics, in Florida. Bill published my story in a comic titled Starmasters. Around this time Marvel inker/writer Bob Layton had moved to the Boston area and was looking for an inking assistant. The folks at the local comic shop hooked us up and Bob hired me as his background man. I worked for him for about a year. Bob introduced me to the editors at Marvel. I started getting work on my own shortly after that. First as an inker and then as a penciler.

Stuart: Your five-year run on the *Fantastic Four* (issues 356-414) is the third longest consecutive run in the book's history, just behind Kirby and Byrne. This is lofty territory that elevates you into the upper echelon of the comic's hierarchy. Yet, considering this long run and excellent sales for the book, you were taken off the series. Could you tell us what the details were regarding your exit from the *Fantastic Four*?

Ryan: Some executives at Marvel read newspaper articles that claimed that the House of Ideas was hurt by the defection of the one-time Marvel creators who developed Image Comics. These businessmen believed that Marvel had to entice Jim Lee, Rob Liefield and Todd McFarlane et al back to the fold. Jim Lee was apparently offered any title he wanted. He chose the *Fantastic Four*. At the time the *Fantastic Four* was, with the exception of X-titles and Spider-Man, the highest selling Marvel comic in the lineup. The change of creators was politically motivated.

I found out about my removal from active service to the *FF* on the Internet. I was never officially told that I was fired. Luckily, I had friends at DC who were only too happy to take me in.

Stuart: That's not a very professional way to treat anyone. It's funny because Jim Lee didn't last all that long on the *Fantastic Four* (Vol. 2, issues 1-13). Not to point the blame at Jim, because he's a very talented artist, but clearly they were wrong about his ability to improve sales.

Ryan: I happen to like Jim very much. He is a talented artist and a nice person. Though it hurt to lose the *FF*, I don't hold any animosity toward Jim.

Stuart: What's it like working with John Byrne, a truly creative artist, but he does have a reputation for being

cantankerous?

Ryan: It was "interesting"!

Stuart: Hmmm, that is certainly a politically correct statement. Can you share any of these interesting experiences, but only in a humorous, positive light?

Ryan: John and I were working on a multi-issue story arc on *Iron Man* called the Dragon Seed Saga. Tony Stark had serious nerve damage to his spinal cord and traveled to China to consult with their leading scientist/physician hoping for a cure. During his stay the land was under attack by Fin Fang Foom, Chen Su and the Mandarin. In the first issue John wrote eight pages of exposition dealing with Tony, the doctor and a leading military leader who requested the aid of Iron Man to help with their problems. The rest of the plot, fourteen pages, simply read, "Jim Rhodes in the Iron Man armor fights Fin Fang Foom. Make it big and exciting. Rhody loses to Fin Fang Foom."

The next issue John wrote eight pages of exposition and then wrote, "Tony operates remote controlled Iron Man armor, fights Fin Fang Foom for fourteen pages. Make it big. Make it exciting. Make it different from the first issue."

I called John and politely asked for co-plotting credit on these issues. John asked, "Why?" I responded, "Because I'm basically making up two-thirds of the story." John's defense was that this is how Stan and Jack worked in the early days. I countered with my feeling that this was not the early days. He was not Stan and I was not Jack. I wasn't looking for any extra money. I just wanted the readers to know what I had contributed to the story. John agreed to extra credit on the next issue. Sure enough, I got a plot with eight pages of exposition and then fourteen pages of "Tony in the armor fighting Fin Fang Foom. Make it big. Make it exciting. Make it different from the previous two issues." When this issue came out I immediately turned to the credit page. It read "John Byrne-writer, Paul Ryan-fight arranger." Not exactly what I had in mind.

Stuart: During your *Fantastic Four* days were you involved in the plotting?

Ryan: You will note that in the credits I am listed as co-plotter. Don't believe it! I would occasionally make a suggestion or two with regard to the plot. Beyond that, it was all Tom. He just liked to spread the guilt around.

Stuart: That would be Tom DeFalco. It seems most writers are reluctant to share the plotting credits, and here Tom is being more than generous. He must have been great to work with!

Ryan: Tom was great to work with. He has a great sense of humor. Very self deprecating. He knows comics inside out and loves them with a passion.

Stuart: When most comic book readers think of Paul Ryan, the titles that come to mind are the *Fantastic Four* and *Superman*. There must be some issues or runs from these series that stand out in your mind as your favorites?

Ryan: I enjoyed *FF* #358. We took the FF to the Skrull Homeworld. I got to draw some of the earliest incarnations of the Skrulls as drawn by Kirby. The Giant Snake, The Metal Creature with the spikes, etc. I also enjoyed *FF* #375 and *FF* #400. Very Cosmic.

With Superman, I had fun with the Superman of the Future. It was a three-issue story arc with Superman fighting Muto. It was written by Dan Jurgens and took its premise from a Silver Age Superman story. I always loved *Magnus, Robot Fighter ...4000 AD* when I was a kid. This story had Superman fighting

robot hordes in the future. It was my chance to do Superman as Magnus.

Stuart: Funny that you would mention Magnus, Robot Fighter. I would love to see you take on that character. I have always felt that Magnus deserves another chance. Would you like to draw Magnus, and if so, would you draw him in the traditional sense or re-create him?

Ryan: I would love to draw Magnus. I loved the characters and the look of North Am as depicted by Russ Manning. If I chose to change anything, it would be with regard to the cars. Russ showed people lying on their stomach while driving—not very realistic or comfortable if you ask me. We are talking definite neck strain here. Ah, to draw Leeja Clane in that black dress. That would be fun. Russ certainly had a way with beautiful women.

Stuart: You have had the pleasure of working with some great writers, who was your favorite?

Ryan: That would have to be a toss up between Tom DeFalco and Dan Jurgens. Tom is a very good writer—always kept me guessing. Dan, being an artist, wrote with a keen visual sense that was a delight for an artist. He always knew how many panels worked best on any given page.

Stuart: I remember that you mentioned to me at the recent Toronto comic convention that the character that you have most enjoyed drawing is Superman. What is it about the Man of Steel that makes him your favorite and would you consider your Superman work the pinnacle of your career?

Ryan: Superman was always my favorite superhero. I watched *The Adventures of Superman* with George Reeves when I was very young and ran around the house with a towel wrapped around my neck. I am lucky I never clotheslined myself back then. Superman is an icon in the comics industry recognizable to the general population. I like being able to say," I drew Superman." It was a nice addition to my resume. I don't think I have reached any pinnacle yet. I hope not. I think of a pinnacle as the highest point you can reach and it's all downhill from there.

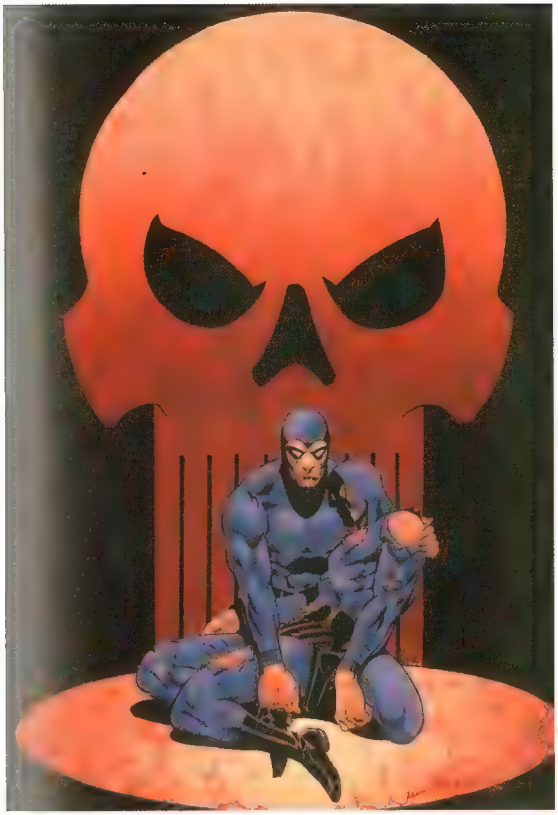
Stuart: I can relate to your childhood love of Superman. For me it was Zorro and Davy Crockett. Check out the photo of me as Zorro in *CBM* #88 (page 7). I think it is only natural that we wanted to emulate our heroes; it is great that you were able to add Superman to your list of credentials. Is there any particular story arc or special foe of Superman's that you would like to tackle?

Ryan: Can't think of anything off the top of my head. I was also enamored of Zorro and Davy Crockett. I watched both when I was young. I was, alternately, the bold renegade carving a Z with his blade, the Tennessee King of the Wild Frontier, or that strange visitor from another planet coming to earth to fight for Truth, Justice and the American Way.

Stuart: Have you ever given any thought to producing painted work similar to that of Alex Ross?

Ryan: I would love to be able to paint like Alex. Unfortunately, I don't have his talent or the time to develop that skill.

Stuart: There is always a lot of hype



and politics associated with the Hot New artists that are always breaking into the business. Do you think the big publishers tend to lose sight of the artists that have proven their abilities time and time again, only to move them aside for the new prospect? Not that we don't need to encourage the entrance of new blood, but I sometimes get the impression that there isn't enough loyalty within the business. What is your opinion?

Ryan: I had dinner with Gene Colan and his wife Adrienne during the San Diego Con. That particular subject came up. It is true that publishers are guilty of ignoring existing talent in favor of finding the next hot writer or hot artist who will save the industry. It is unfortunate. I have heard that not all of these newcomers have the basic concept of storytelling or deadline commitment.

It has been my experience that there is no loyalty in the comics business. It is no longer enough to be a good artist who always makes his deadlines.

Stuart: You've also had long runs on such comics icons as the Flash, Iron Man and the Avengers, yet you've moved away to less mainstream publishers and are now turning out brilliant work on the Phantom by Egmont of Sweden. Is there less work available in the US or is there another reason why you have shifted away from the big publishers?

Ryan: Marvel and DC have not offered me any work in quite some time. I go where I am accepted. I had a good year and a half association with CrossGen. They called and offered me a contract for ten stories per year. They also offered me an in-house position if I ever chose to move to Florida. Egmont has been very supportive. I am in my third year with this Swedish Publisher. The Phantom is distributed by Egmont in Sweden, Denmark and Norway. It is then reprinted by Frew Publication in Australia. I have a nice fan base in these countries now.

Inking VS Penciling

Stuart: You initially started your career as an inker and doing background layouts, yet you are primarily known as a penciler. How did you move from inker to penciler, and which do you prefer?

Ryan: I was trained by Bob Layton to be an inker. I naturally sought work at Marvel as an inker. I got my first inking assignment on *Thing* #27. I took two weeks vacation from my day job to complete the assignment. When I turned it in to the editor, Mark Gruenwald handed me *Thing* #29 to ink. I had no vacation time left. My buddy, Bob, suggested that now was the time to decide if I was really serious about the comics business. After lining up additional assignments with other

editors and much soul searching, I made the decision to quite my job and go full tilt into the world of the freelance artist. I finished *Thing* #29, quit my job and spent the next two weeks waiting for those other assignments to come in. They never did. In a panic, I called Bob for advice. He said that he knew I could draw. He suggested that I do some penciling samples and, hopefully, get some work as a penciler until the inking started up again. I showed my samples around Marvel and the rest is history.

Stuart: You've had many inkers over your pencils, such as Tom Palmer, Danny Bulanadi and John Nyberg. Was there anyone that you felt truly captured the essence of your work? On the reverse side, were there any inkers that you feel were less sympathetic to your style of pencils?

Ryan: I would rather not denigrate any inker so let me just hit on the good ones. Tom Palmer is an extraordinary artist who just happens to ink. Danny was always a very good inker. Joe Rubenstein was always on my want list as were Mark Farmer and Norm Rapmund. Tony DeZuniga was sent from heaven. I had the opportunity, while working with CrossGen, to work with an incredibly talented artist/inker from England, Mike Perkins.

Stuart: You've mentioned some great inkers. I believe Tony DeZuniga inked some of your DC pages. He was one of the Filipino crew that DC brought over in the '70s. I believe Tony was a great artist and he seems to have labored away in near obscurity. Some of his work on the DC horror books was marvelous. Did you get to know Tony or was it a long distance work arrangement?

Ryan: As with most artists I collaborated with it was a long distance arrangement. Tony lives in California; I live in Massachusetts. On occasion I was asked by my editor if there was an inker I wanted to work over my pencils. I always had a list of favorite inkers, and Tony was at the top of the list. I loved his work with John Buscema on *Conan*. I had the opportunity to meet Tony in the early '90s in San Diego. Up to that time we had no personal contact. He drew a great Red Sonja in my sketch book. Most recently we met again in San Diego at Comicon International this summer (2004). Tony is one of the most talented artists in the business. I purchased two original pen and ink drawings from him. They are gorgeous.

Stuart: On many runs you have done double duty, acting as the creative artist for both pencils and inks. What is the secret behind being productive and keeping up with the tight schedules and deadlines?

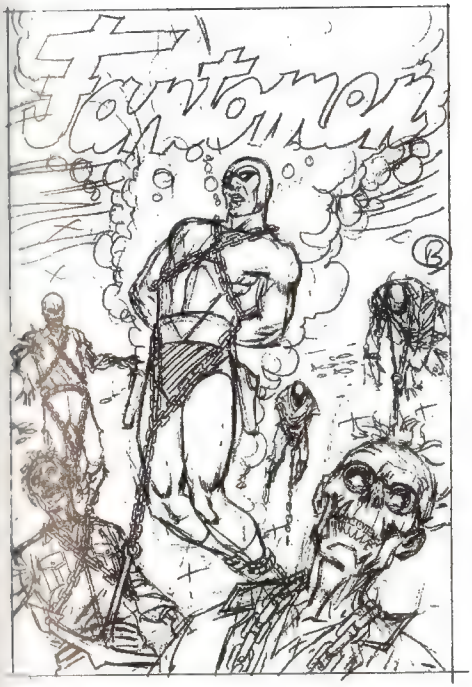
Ryan: I would say dispensing with the nonessentials of life like sleeping. I am constantly looking at the calendar in terms of how many pages I need to do each day. It is a matter of discipline and dedication. If the deadline is a real killer (I had to pencil and ink 32 pages plus a cover in five weeks) I put everything else on hold until the job is done.

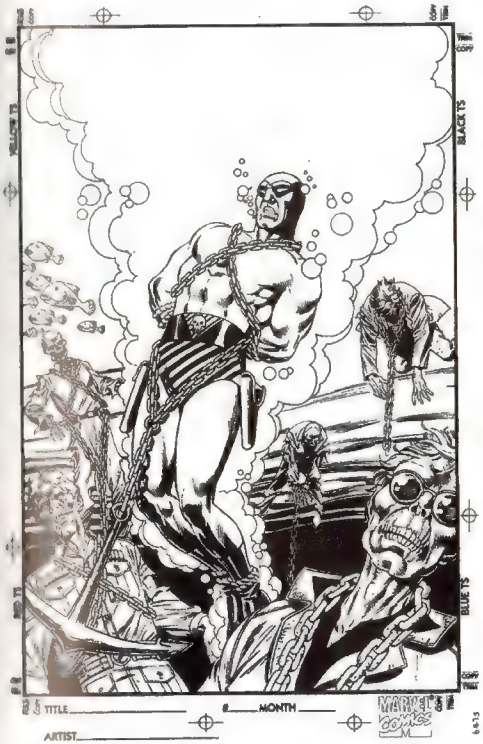
Stuart: When you start a page, what process do you follow? Is it different when you know you will be inking your own work?

Ryan: I read the story and do a quick thumbnail layout of the page. I usually spend less than ten minutes in the thumbnail stage. The thumbnails are so loose that the average person would be at a loss to figure out what he is looking at. It is just a guide for me. It is my first mental image based on the script. I then go right to a full size sheet and lay it out in blue pencil. I then finish the art with a regular pencil. If I am penciling for an inker I will include all the shadows and textures. If I am to be the inker, I draw only the line work and explore the lighting and textures in the inking process.

Stuart: When an artist is as familiar as you are with the inking process, what inking skills do you look for in an inker for your own pencils?

Ryan: I look for an inker who is also an artist. I don't want someone who traces. I want someone who looks at my pencils and sees possibilities. Tom Palmer and Mike Perkins come to mind. They can take my pencils and make





them better.

Stuart: That is what defines a great inker—the ability to see the possibilities. When I interviewed Butch Guice in *CBM* #101, here's what he said about Mike Perkins "Mike has one basic directive from me (said only half-jokingly at the time)…ink my intent, not the actual drivel I happen to produce. So far, he is succeeding beyond all my expectations. Mike's just great. His Archards's Agents penciling and inking work is a wonderful example of just how talented the guy really is." Specifically what is it about Mike's inks that impressed *you* so?

Ryan: Mike has a great sense of texture. He has great line quality. If you look at the original pages, you see a great deal of fine line work. I agree that Mike is a great inker. But he is more than that. He is a great artist and a nice person.

Stuart: Given the choice, which do you prefer, working on covers or interior pages?

Ryan: Interior pages. I am a storyteller who can draw. I have never thought of myself as an artist.

Stuart: Having had the unique experiences of working with some major talents (both writers and other artists), who has had the greatest effect on your career?

Ryan: I would have to say Mark Gruenwald. Mark got me to think more analytically about what I do. It was Mark who first suggested that I cast my characters in *DP7*. Instead of doing generic faces and bodies, Mark and I chose to model our cast of characters after real life people. With that in mind, I frequently look to magazines, catalogues and such when I am drawing a new character.

Current Projects

Stuart: Like many of the top talents in the business, you recently did some work for CrossGen. How did that come about?

Ryan: I was approached online to do a commission of a CrossGen character. My client was quite happy with the results and posted the image on a website frequented by folks at CrossGen. I got a call from Ron Marz who asked if I would like to work for them. Once it was established that I didn't have to move to Florida we were off and running.

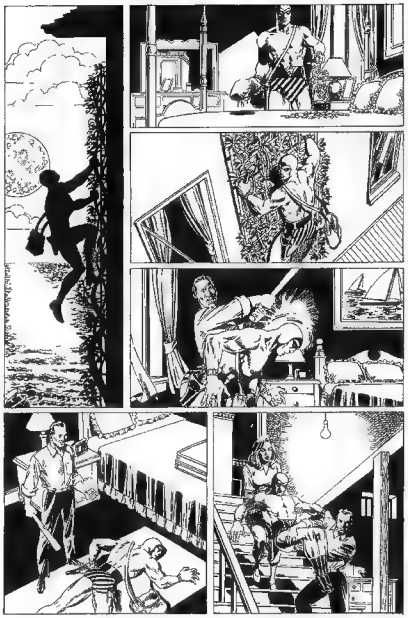
Stuart: While your work on Crossgen projects was limited, it was particularly nice. The four issues of *Ruse* seem to be a change from the traditional spandex type superhero books. Do these non-superhero books present any particular challenges?

Ryan: Not really. My work on *DP7* gave me the experience of drawing the real world. The biggest challenge working for CrossGen was to draw in a style similar to that of the regular artist. That would have been Butch Guice on *Ruse*, Steve Epting on *Crux* and George Perez on *Solus*. I never got any complaints. I don't recall any specific directive to draw like them; I just wanted to keep a certain consistency to the books. I studied their issues. In dealing with a page I would ask myself, "How would Butch handle this?" It was the same with *Crux* and Steve Epting.

Stuart: The cover to *Ruse* #25 is a masterpiece and has a true Sherlock Holmes feel to it. Can you describe the process that you use to develop a cover image?

Ryan: I actually submitted two very different versions of that cover. I read the story and try to imagine a scene that represents the spirit of the issue if not an exact copy of an interior panel.

Stuart: Most of the CrossGen staff were located in Tampa and worked in a modern day bullpen environment. When you started with



them and remained located in the New England area, did you suspect that the winds of change were about to start blowing at CrossGen?

Ryan: I was pretty much in the dark about the inner workings at CrossGen. I suspected that something was amiss when the checks stopped coming in and my email and phone messages were not returned.

Stuart: Are you still working on anything for CrossGen, or have you severed your relationship with them until they resolve their financial problems?

Ryan: I was asked, at one point, if I would consider working for them again. At the time, they still owed me for two complete stories. I replied that if they would pay me what they owed me and could prove to me that the company was solvent I would consider it. To date I have not been paid for those assignments.

Stuart: As an artist who has been around for nearly 25 years and worked with a wide variety of publishers, what went wrong at CrossGen? Was it more than just a financial backer that pulled out or was the entire scheme too ambitious?

Ryan: Actually this marks my twentieth year. I started really, really late in life. I was too far outside the loop to know what caused the problems at CrossGen.

The Best Comic Book That You Cannot Buy in the US

Stuart: Let's talk more about your latest project *The Phantom* by Egmont of Sweden. How did you land this project?

Ryan: I have another fan to thank for this job. I was contacted by a fan in Sweden, Jonas Vesterlund, following an eBay auction I had been running. He loved my work. He mentioned that in his younger days he was an intern at Egmont. He asked if I would consider working for a company outside the US. With the contact information he supplied I wrote to Publisher Ulf Granberg at Egmont. I sent samples of my work as well. Ulf wrote back saying that he liked my work and that the timing was fortuitous. He was attending the Annual Phantom Conference the following week in which stories and artists for the coming year are discussed and selected. He asked if I could do model sheets of the Phantom and his supporting cast and get them to him before the conference. I did, and the rest is history.

Stuart: Was the Phantom a favorite of yours as a youngster?

Ryan: Definitely. I read his adventures in our local paper every day.

Stuart: Does a character have to have personal appeal for you to be excited about the project? By that I mean, are there certain characters, such as the Phantom, that generate more creative energy?

Ryan: It certainly helps. I remember my first lunch meeting with Mike Carlin when I was considering the move from Marvel to DC. We discussed page rate and possible assignments. The first job Mike offered to me was a Superman Annual. There was this little kid with a towel wrapped around his neck inside me screaming, "YES, YES, YES!!!!"

Stuart: The Phantom does not generate the same level of prestige as say, Batman or Superman, but he is a very popular character and he certainly has had longevity. Why is this character so popular in Europe and in Australia, but not in North America?

Ryan: I have been asked that question often. I really do not know. Maybe he suffers from the same

problem that plagues Aquaman—the character's environment. Not many people can relate to stories that happen predominately in the jungle or underwater. Your guess is as good as mine.

Stuart: I was very impressed with the work you have created for the Phantom, especially the covers. Your cover to a *Phantom* issue won an award for the best cover. This must have been particularly gratifying.

Ryan: You could say that. It was to a story entitled, "The Longbow of Little John." It won the Phantom Fan Award for best cover in 2002. It was nice to be accepted by the Swedish audience.

Stuart: What's coming up next for Paul Ryan and the Phantom?

Ryan: We are currently working on a long-range story arc, Phantom Year One. Last year, in a conversation with Ulf, I asked if there had ever been a story that explored our Phantom's first day on the job. I was curious to explore Kit's feelings and insecurities at the death of his father and the assumption of the mantle of the Phantom. This idea was expanded at the Annual Conference. We are producing a year's worth of stories (*Phantom* comes out every two weeks) chronicling the Phantom's first year. I got to illustrate issues one and two. I am just now finishing issue seven with issue thirteen waiting on my board.

Stuart: You mentioned earlier how both of your assignments at CrossGen and Egmont came about due to the Internet, and that's how we met! Therefore, this seems to be a good opportunity to publish your web site address. Check out Paul's site at www.secondstargraphics.com.

If you were approached by Marvel or DC and offered any character or series, what would you pick?

Ryan: Thor.

Stuart: Ah, Thor, the God of Thunder, one of the icons of the Marvel Universe. What is it about Thor that appeals to you?

Ryan: With Thor you have the latitude of working in the real world or in the Realm of Fantasy.

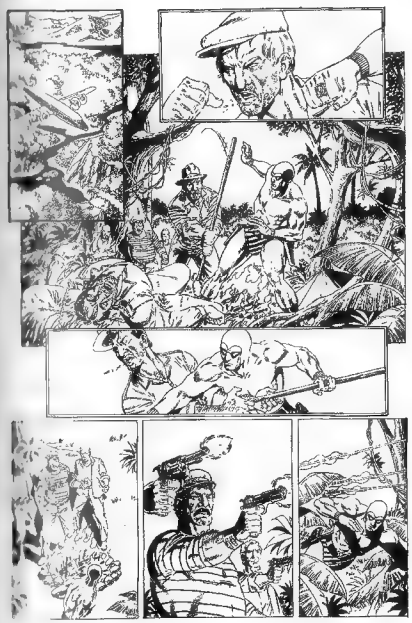
Stuart: When I think of Thor, I always associate him with Jack Kirby. If you drew Thor, how would Kirby's seminal run on the character affect your approach?

Ryan: I couldn't help but bring some of Jack's vision of the Thunder God to my work. I purchased *Journey Into Mystery* with Thor's first appearance when it first came out and was hooked. I followed him for years.

Stuart: When all is said and done, when you have hung up the pencil, what would you like to be remembered for?

Ryan: For being a good person and a reliable artist.

Stuart: Well, anyone who has met you will attest that you are one of the good guys in the business, and your body of work speaks for itself. Thanks for taking the time to share your experiences and adventures with the readers of *CBM*, and I am certain we will be seeing many more beautiful examples of Paul Ryan's art.



News...
News...
News...
News...
News...
News...

DIVERS UNAWARE OF A STRANGER AMONG THEM
THE TUBE, PEOPLE! WHY HAVE YOU NOT FOUND IT?
MINA...THEIR LEADER...GETTING IMPATIENT!
Falk 2-2
MAYBE IT'S NOT THERE, MINA!
THEN YOU THINK THE ARCHIVE IN BERLIN IS IN ERROR!?
KEEP LOOKING!!
DEPAUL & RYAN
OTTO, HELP ME SEARCH THIS AREA!
THAT DIVER HAS MISTAKEN ME FOR SOMEONE ELSE!
Falk 2-3
I CAN'T IGNORE HIM WITHOUT AROUSING SUSPICION!
DEPAUL & RYAN
OTTO HERE! WAS THAT HANS WHO SPOKE? WHERE ARE YOU?

...from the Deep Woods...from the Deep Woods...

by John R. Stuart

Phantom daily strip

The hot news in early January 2005 from King Features was that the superb artist Paul Ryan would be assuming the very select task of drawing the *Phantom* dailies for King Features. Long time artist George Olesen has retired and the plum assignment of drawing The Ghost Who Walks now passes to Ryan. Paul is also continuing his involvement on the Egmont *Phantom* series. The first of the Ryan penciled strips started during the week of January 31st. The current story arc involves an ancient Egyptian structure found in Eden, as well as mutation experiments and neo-Nazis.

When asked how he felt about tackling this new assignment Paul commented "I am very, very excited to be working on the *Phantom* strip. Yes, I know I've been working on the *Phantom* comic book for three years but there is something special about working on the strip. This is where it all started back in 1936. I was always a big Phantom fan. Even cut out the Sundays and pasted them in a scrapbook. I still remember crawling under the living room coffee table and spreading the Sunday comics out on the rug. My favorite strips were *The Phantom*, *Prince Valiant* and *Flash Gordon*."

While Paul is a true veteran of the comic book

business, his new job presents some new challenges. "The daily strip has certain limitations not found in the comic book. Size does matter! Detail is limited by the final print size. I have seen the *Phantom* strip reduced to the size of a postage stamp. Consequently, the lettering has to be large enough to read at this ridiculous size, thereby cramping the artwork. Also, I have to letter the strip. Something I didn't have to do with the comic book."

Phantom Chronicles

The *Phantom* continues its time-honored tradition of attracting top-notch artists!! The artist that produced a stellar seven-year run on *Web of Spider-Man*, yes that's right, the very talented Alex Saviuk has joined the group of artists working simultaneously on the Egmont (Swedish) and Frew (Australian) *Phantom* series. His first issue, #19–Egmont/#1392 Frew ("The Courier"), appeared in September 2004 and his second book is expected this summer. Alex's *Phantom* involvement does not cease with the Egmont and Frew books; Alex has also produced a *Phantom* design, which will be used to create a *Phantom* statue by the sculptor Shawn Nagle! This Saviuk design has been approved by King Features and is certain to become a favorite with the fans. This is actually a return to the *Phantom* for Alex—he previously drew the character in the four-issue 1987 Marvel (Star Comics) mini-series, *The Defenders of the Earth*.

Here are Alex's thoughts on his new assignment: "It's an honor, a blessing and a pleasure to be associated with another icon of the comics world—I love the jungle theme, since I was very young following Tarzan on TV and The Phantom in comics and newspapers—it's a lot of fun drawing all the flora and fauna especially after doing so many buildings and rooftops over the years."

Alex is also working on a new *Phantom* book for Moonstone Publishing, with a script by Ben Raab for late in 2005.

The GHOST Who WALKS

by Ron Goulart

The Phantom has been working as a costumed crime fighter for close to three score years and ten. He first appeared in the funny papers. That was in February of 1936. Early in 1938, by way of reprints in *Ace Comics*, he was also appearing in comic books, thus beating such stalwart costumed heroes as Superman and Batman to the newsstands. Although he dressed like a super-hero, he possessed no super powers and, for quite a while, didn't even own a civilian identity. Syndicated by Hearst's King Features, *The Phantom* was written by Lee Falk and drawn initially by Ray Moore.

The PHANTOM by LEE FALK and RAY MOORE
HOLD TIGHT, GLORIA. NOT THE IDEAL POSTURE FOR SHARP-SHOOTING, BUT WE'LL DO OUR BEST.
HE ALMOST CLIPPED ME!
AIN'T HUMAN-- THE WAY THAT GUY SHOOTS!
WINN GAVE ME A CODE MESSAGE BEFORE HE DIED!
COL. WINN -- DEAD? IMPOSSIBLE! I DON'T BELIEVE IT! HE WAS SUPPOSED TO MEET ME HERE! HOW DO YOU KNOW HE IS-- DID YOU SEE IT HAPPEN?
HE'S DEAD--
KILLED BY ONE OF THAT GANG DOWN THERE. WHO ARE THOSE MEN? WHY DID THEY KILL HIM -- AND ALMOST KILL YOU?-- -NOT TO MENTION ME.
"COL. WINN WAS AN INTELLIGENCE AGENT. I WAS HIS SECRETARY. TRAVELING THROUGH THE INTERIOR OF TIBET, WE WERE GIVEN A MESSAGE BY A HIGHER AGENT."
NEVER MIND THE MEANING. JUST REMEMBER IT.
"COL WINN AND I WERE EACH GIVEN A PART OF THE CODE MESSAGE, SEPARATELY. HE WAS TO TRAVEL BY LAND, I BY SEA. THE MAN SAID IT WAS OF TREMENDOUS, EARTH-SHAKING IMPORTANCE!"
"I REACHED ADEN, OUR MEETING-PLACE, AND WAITED FOR COLONEL WINN. I WAS ATTACKED IN MY ROOM -- WHERE I WAS KEPT UNTIL YOU FOUND ME."
BUT, GLORIA, WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT?
I DON'T KNOW! I'VE COME HALF-WAY AROUND THE WORLD, CARRYING A MEANINGLESS FIVE-LETTER WORD--"PLOS!" --IT'S ALMOST DRIVEN ME CRAZY WITH CURIOSITY!
NEXT WEEK--The CODE MESSAGE

YOU'LL LIVE LONG ENOUGH TO SEE ME CAPTURE THE OLYMPIA, THEN---I'LL HAVE THE JOY OF WATCHING YOU DIE--- SLOWLY-- SLOWLY!
PRETENDING NOT TO FEEL THE WHIP, EH? TOO PROUD TO CRINGE, EH!
YOU'RE NOT A WOMAN. YOU'RE A VICIOUS ANIMAL. SOMEHOW, I FEEL SORRY FOR YOU. YOU'VE MADE A MESS OF YOUR LIFE.
TAKE HIM--AWAY!
THE--THE ONLY MAN I--I'VE EVER LOVED--HE--HE WAS RIGHT--BUT--BUT IT'S TOO LATE TO--TO TURN BACK--NOW—
AND LATER, IN HER OWN ROOM---

A jungle-based mystery man, the Phantom combined the best qualities of generations of pulp mystery men, including Jimmie Dale (alias the Gray Seal), Zorro, the Shadow, the Spider and the Phantom Detective, with those of Tarzan and a host of Burroughs-derived jungle lords. The 1930s were especially hospitable to phantoms. The aforementioned Phantom Detective, for instance, began his monthly pulp magazine career late in 1932. Three years later Mel Graff introduced a masked and costumed super-hero known as the Phantom Magician in his *Adventures of Patsy* newspaper strip. Graff, who'd been the first illustrator of the *Phantom Detective* pulp, was obviously inspired by that earlier chore. And the movies continued to be fond of the word phantom, as in *The Phantom of Paris* (1931), *Phantom of Crestwood* (1932), *The Phantom President* (1932), *The Phantom Thunderbolt* (1933) and the Gene Autry serial *The Phantom Empire* (1935).

By the middle 1930s Tarzan was enjoying a renewed success. The MGM movie series, begun with *Tarzan the Ape Man* in 1932 and starring champion swimmer Johnny Weismuller as the jungle lord, was doing well and by 1936 there had been two sequels. The *Tarzan* comic strip, drawn on Sunday by the formidable Hal Foster, was appearing in a substantial list of papers as syndicated by United Feature. What Falk did with his new strip was combine the elements of the masked pulp hero tradition with elements of the white lord of the jungle genre. This proved to be a winning combination.

The Phantom was the second newspaper strip invented by Lee Falk. In 1934 he'd come up with *Mandrake the Magician* and sold it to King Features Syndicate. Mandrake, who had some affinities with the earlier radio and movie mystic known as Chandu the Magician, was drawn by Phil Davis. Like Falk, he was a resident of St. Louis. When *The Phantom* was sold, Davis' assistant Ray Moore was signed on as the artist. By this time the editors at King had decided upon a favorite style for adventure strips and that was the dry brush illustrative approach Alex Raymond used on the daily *Secret Agent* X-9 and on the Sunday *Flash Gordon/Jungle Jim* page. Phil Davis used a variation of the Raymond style on *Mandrake* and Charles Flanders was persuaded to become an exponent when he took over *X-9* and *King of the Royal Mounted*. It was natural then that Ray Moore, too, would draw *The Phantom* in his best approximation of the Raymond look.

During the opening daily sequence of the strip readers learned of the Phantom's origins. It turned out that his ancestors had been in the masked man business for over four centuries. Early versions of the origin, which Falk repeated every so often, explained that "four hundred years ago, a man washed up on a remote Bengal shore. He had seen his father killed and his ship scuttled by Singh pirates…. He swore an oath on the skull of his father's murderer. He was the *First Phantom*, and the eldest male of each succeeding generation carried on." In the oath he swore "to devote my life to the destruction of all forms of piracy, greed and cruelty."

That initial Phantom was befriended by a tribe of pygmies known as the Bandar and they quickly looked to him as their leader. His costume was adapted from the image of an idol of another jungle tribe. The Bandars, being in on the secret, knew that when one Phantom passed on, a son took over the title, costume and mask. All other jungle tribes weren't especially astute, as was then the tradition among fictional natives of the pulps and movies, and assumed that the guy never died. This led to the masked man picking up such nicknames as "The Man Who Cannot Die" and "The Ghost Who Walks." It was eventually revealed that the current Phantom was the twenty first in the line. In speaking of him, Guran, the pygmy leader, once explained that "we would be helpless without the Phantom…There would be wars—killing. He is our protector."

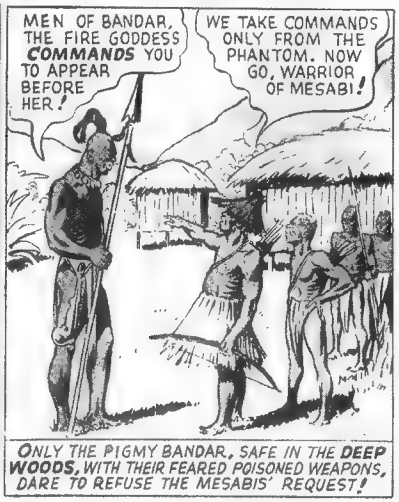
During his first adventure the Phantom met Diana Palmer, who at various points in her active life was an aviator, an explorer, a nurse and an Olympic swimmer. For him she became, at once, the woman. As trouble-prone as Lois Lane, the Phantom was frequently called upon to rescue her. In love with Diana, he proposed early on, but, alas, it was to be forty years before they actually wed. Like many another comic strip hero, he was forced to practice marriage interuptus. Every time he and Diana planned a wedding, something came up to postpone it. Usually it was a mystery that required immediate solving. As he once explained to his perennial fiancée, when Scotland Yard summoned him to clear up a serious mess in India, "I can't shake off the oaths that make me the Phantom—so easily. And I can't marry you now—on the chance you'll be a widow before you get your bridal dress packed." Later in that same 1938 sequence a British officer in India explains to a subordinate why the

The PHANTOM by
LEE FALK and
RAY MOORE
BEGINNING — The FIRE GODDESS!

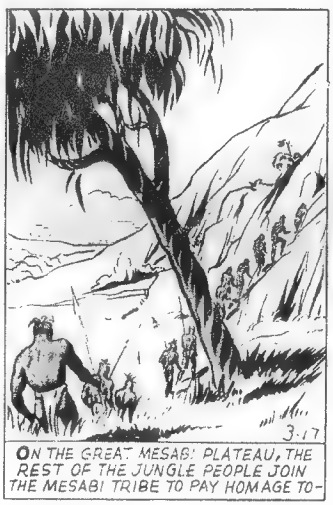
I TELL YOU, SIR, THE JUNGLE'S GONE CRAZY! YOU CAN'T WALK TWO STEPS WITHOUT A REGIMENT GUARD! ROBBERY! KILLING! THE NATIVES ARE WILD!
AND WE DON'T KNOW WHY! CANCEL ALL SAFARI PERMITS UNTIL WE GET TO THE BOTTOM OF THIS!
AT A MILITARY POST ON THE BENGALI COAST...

IN A VAST UNCHARTED JUNGLE, SO LONG UNDER THE SWAY OF THE PHANTOM'S LAW AND PEACE, A NEW, STRANGE POWER HAS COME DURING HIS ABSENCE!

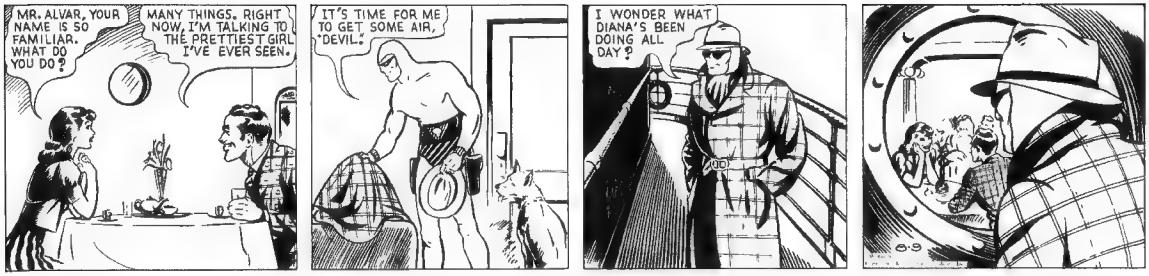
THE FIRE GODDESS CALLS!
WE HEAR AND OBEY, WARRIOR OF MESABI!
ALL THE TRIBES OF THE PLAINS, VALLEYS AND HILLS ARE SUMMONED TO THE HIGH MESABI PLATEAU, HOME OF THE MESABI TRIBE...


MEN OF BANDAR, THE FIRE GODDESS COMMANDS YOU TO APPEAR BEFORE HER!
WE TAKE COMMANDS ONLY FROM THE PHANTOM. NOW GO, WARRIOR OF MESABI!
ONLY THE PIGMY BANDAR, SAFE IN THE DEEP WOODS, WITH THEIR FEARED POISONED WEAPONS, DARE TO REFUSE THE MESABIS' REQUEST!

THE MESABI ARE SPREADING VIOLENCE AND DEATH AT THE COMMANDS OF THEIR FIRE GODDESS!
WHERE IS THE PHANTOM, GURAN?
I DON'T KNOW. I DON'T KNOW!


3-17
ON THE GREAT MESABI PLATEAU, THE REST OF THE JUNGLE PEOPLE JOIN THE MESABI TRIBE TO PAY HOMAGE TO-

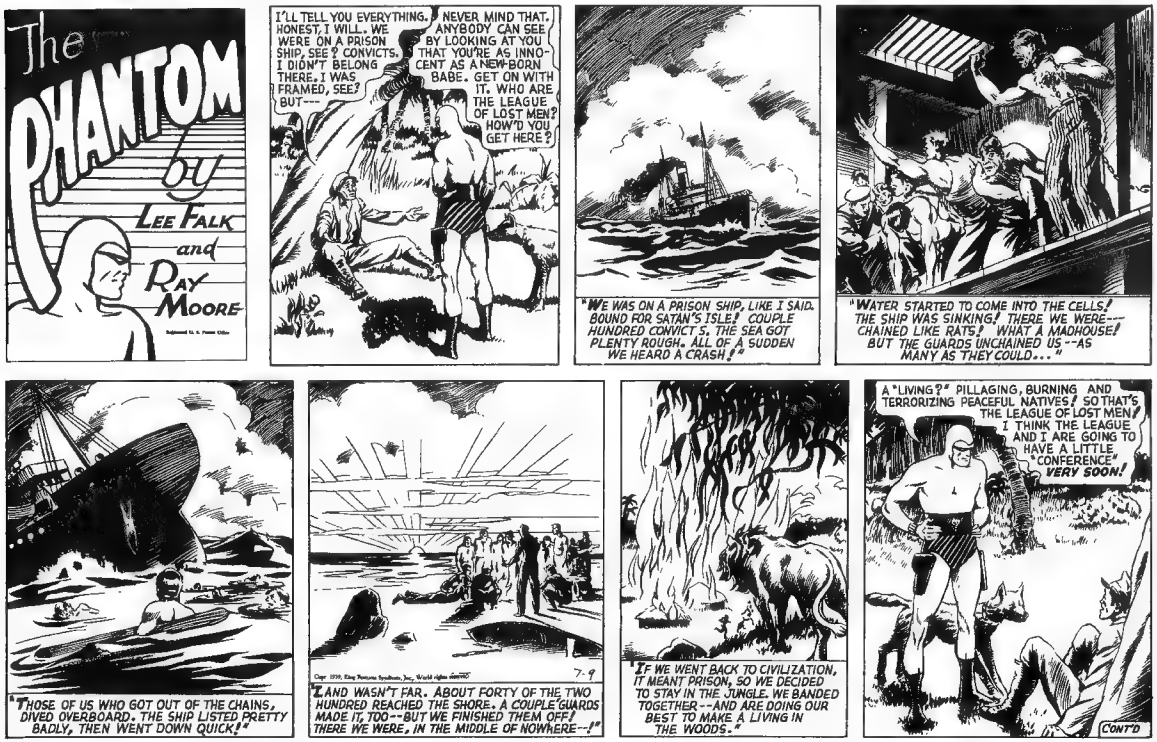
THE FIRE GODDESS! THE ANCIENT PROPHECIES OF THE MESABI ARE FULFILLED, AS THEIR LEGENDARY GODDESS OF WRATH AND FURY RETURNS TO RULE THEM!
Continued-

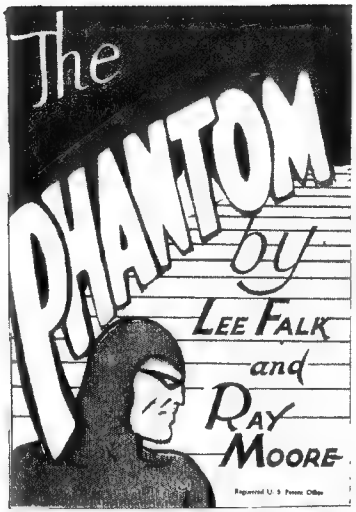

MR. ALVAR, YOUR NAME IS SO FAMILIAR. WHAT DO YOU DO?
MANY THINGS. RIGHT NOW, I'M TALKING TO THE PRETTIEST GIRL I'VE EVER SEEN.
IT'S TIME FOR ME TO GET SOME AIR, "DEVIL."
I WONDER WHAT DIANA'S BEEN DOING ALL DAY?

Phantom is so much in demand, saying that "he's the world's number one trouble-shooter! His family has made it a specialty for four centuries."

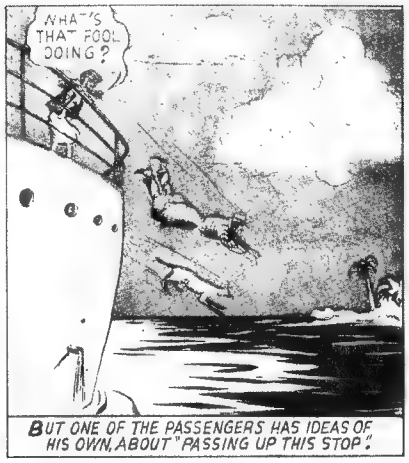
The exact location of the Phantom's stretch of jungle has changed over the years. The reference to Bengal in the early origin stories would seem to indicate that he originally resided somewhere in India. As Phantom authority Todd Goldberg has explained, "His base and family home is in the Skull Cave in the Deep Woods in the country of Bangalla, an ill-defined mythical locale apparently in Africa, judging by the stories depicting black natives and cities. The country was called Bengali and indicated to be in India/Asia in earlier stories (in fact an island in the vicinity of Java/Sumatra was specified to be the place of the Phantom's adventures in the earliest stories). The name changed without explanation in the middle of the 1972 story, "The Witchmen." Falk later stated categorically that the Phantom's country was named "Bangalla," located in Central Africa."

In addition to the Skull Cave, with its Skull Throne, Falk provided his masked hero with other interesting props. There was, for example, the Skull Ring. Whenever the Phantom socked an evildoer on the jaw—something he frequently did—he left a small impression of a skull. Previous mystery men had used similar gimmicks. The Spider had his Spider Ring to brand crooks; Jimmie Dale left a gray seal behind after he'd paid a visit to a criminal's den. The roguish Saint left his calling card, which contained only a stick figure sporting a halo, at the scene of his various impertinent activities. The Phantom also worked with a very


The PHANTOM by LEE FALK and RAY MOORE
I'LL TELL YOU EVERYTHING. HONEST, I WILL. WE WERE ON A PRISON SHIP, SEE? CONVICTS. I DIDN'T BELONG THERE. I WAS FRAMED, SEE? BUT---
NEVER MIND THAT. ANYBODY CAN SEE BY LOOKING AT YOU THAT YOU'RE AS INNOCENT AS A NEW-BORN BABE. GET ON WITH IT. WHO ARE THE LEAGUE OF LOST MEN? HOW'D YOU GET HERE?
"WE WAS ON A PRISON SHIP, LIKE I SAID. BOUND FOR SATAN'S ISLE. COUPLE HUNDRED CONVICTS. THE SEA GOT PLENTY ROUGH. ALL OF A SUDDEN WE HEARD A CRASH!"
"WATER STARTED TO COME INTO THE CELLS! THE SHIP WAS SINKING! THERE WE WERE--- CHAINED LIKE RATS! WHAT A MADHOUSE! BUT THE GUARDS UNCHAINED US--AS MANY AS THEY COULD..."
"THOSE OF US WHO GOT OUT OF THE CHAINS, DIVED OVERBOARD. THE SHIP LISTED PRETTY BADLY, THEN WENT DOWN QUICK!"
"AND WASN'T FAR. ABOUT FORTY OF THE TWO HUNDRED REACHED THE SHORE. A COUPLE GUARDS MADE IT, TOO--BUT WE FINISHED THEM OFF! THERE WE WERE, IN THE MIDDLE OF NOWHERE--!"
"IF WE WENT BACK TO CIVILIZATION, IT MEANT PRISON, SO WE DECIDED TO STAY IN THE JUNGLE. WE BANDED TOGETHER--AND ARE DOING OUR BEST TO MAKE A LIVING IN THE WOODS."
A "LIVING?" PILLAGING, BURNING AND TERRORIZING PEACEFUL NATIVES! SO THAT'S THE LEAGUE OF LOST MEN! I THINK THE LEAGUE AND I ARE GOING TO HAVE A LITTLE "CONFERENCE" VERY SOON!
CONT'D


The
PHANTOM
by
LEE FALK
and
RAY MOORE

YOU MEAN WE CAN'T LAND HERE AND SEE THE SIGHTS? WE OUGHT TO GET A REFUND!
SORRY, FOLKS. ADVICE FROM SHORE SAYS THERE'S TROUBLE IN THESE JUNGLES. NOT SAFE FOR TOURISTS. WE'LL HAVE TO PASS UP THIS SPOT.
ON A TOURIST-CRUISE SHIP, AS IT SLOWLY PASSES THE BENGALI COAST--


WHA--'S THAT FOOL DOING?
BUT ONE OF THE PASSENGERS HAS IDEAS OF HIS OWN, ABOUT "PASSING UP THIS STOP!"

GOOD TO GET BACK, EH DEVIL? WONDER WHAT THAT FELLOW MEANT BY TROUBLE? WE'LL SOON KNOW.
ONCE IN THE WOODS, THE FOOLHARDY PASSENGER BECOMES--THE PHANTOM! HE TAKES A BLACK BIRD FROM A CAGE HIDDEN IN THICK BUSHES--

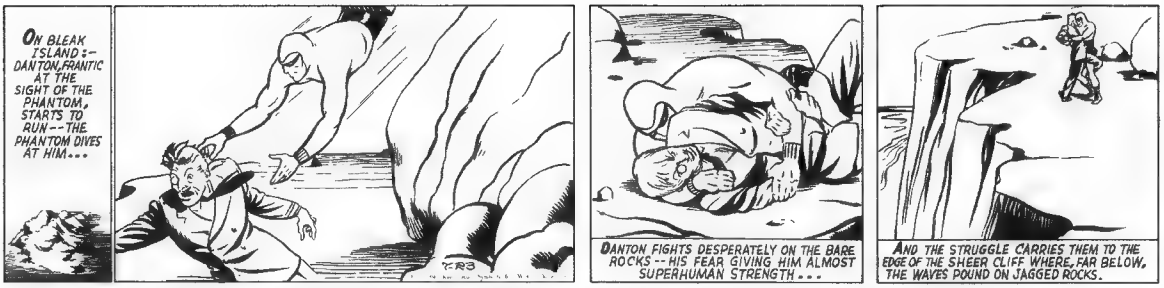
SWIFTLY, THE BIRD WINGS OVER THE JUNGLE, HEADED FOR THE DEEP WOODS--TO ANNOUNCE THE RETURN OF THE PHANTOM!

DID YOU RECEIVE MY SIGN, GURAN?
THE WHITE SKULL BIRD CAME, OH GHOST WHO WALKS. WE SENT MESSENGERS TO ALL TRIBAL CHIEFS, TO COME AND SWEAR THEIR ALLEGIANCE TO THE PHANTOM'S PEACE AND LAW.
A DAY LATER, THE PHANTOM REACHES HIS SKULL THRONE IN THE HEART OF THE DEEP-WOODS-- HE IS GREETED BY GURAN, WITCH-DOCTOR OF THE PYGMY POISON PEOPLE.

BUT NONE CAME. THEY HAVE DESERTED YOU! A NEW POWER HAS COME, BRINGING VIOLENCE AND DEATH! THE FIRE GODDESS OF THE MESABI!
FIRE GODDESS? ALIVE?

YES, ALIVE! THE ANCIENT FIRE GODDESS OF A THOUSAND CENTURIES AGO HAS RETURNED TO INFLAME THE ENTIRE JUNGLE! SHE IS A GODDESS OF FURY AND WRATH, AND SHE RULES WITH A HAND OF IRON!

HAS ANYONE ACTUALLY SEEN HER?
THE WHOLE JUNGLE HAS SEEN HER! AND OBEYS HER! ONLY WE, THE BANDAR, REMAIN FAITHFUL TO YOU, OH GHOST WHO WALKS!
NEXT WEEK = The LEGEND of the FIRE GODDESS..


ON BLEAK ISLAND:— DANTON, FRANTIC AT THE SIGHT OF THE PHANTOM, STARTS TO RUN—THE PHANTOM DIVES AT HIM...
DANTON FIGHTS DESPERATELY ON THE BARE ROCKS—HIS FEAR GIVING HIM ALMOST SUPERHUMAN STRENGTH...
AND THE STRUGGLE CARRIES THEM TO THE EDGE OF THE SHEER CLIFF WHERE, FAR BELOW, THE WAVES POUND ON JAGGED ROCKS.

intelligent wolf known as Devil and a few years later added a white stallion known as Hero. This latter was a gift from one of his many admirers.

In addition to the cliffhanger plots, one of the reasons for the popularity of the strip was the continual supply of pretty young women who frequented Falk's continuities. In addition to making a specialty of rescuing damsels in distress, the Phantom frequently went up against female criminals. In his second outing he battled a group of attractive young lady outlaws known as the Sky Band, who practiced aerial piracy. Since the Phantom had taken a solemn oath to combat piracy, this was right up his alley. This continuity lasted for five months. As would happen throughout the early years of his career, more than one of these crooked girls developed a crush on the Phantom. However, he remained, more or less, faithful to Diana.

In spite of considerable exposure to the sex, the Phantom of the 1930s and 1940s held a low opinion of women. In commenting on the death of the lady who headed the Sky Band, for instance, he observed, "She betrayed the Band and destroyed herself—because she was a woman—with a woman's heart and hate—and jealousy." In a later sequence, wherein he encountered a revived Sky Band, he was perplexed by some of the ladies' behavior and, paraphrasing Freud, he complained, "These women! Who can figure them out?"

There has never been international agreement as to what color the Phantom's costume should be. Since the daily strip ran in black and white, the skin-tight suit was gray, a shade provided

The PHANTOM
by
LEE FALK
and
RAY MOORE
In THE FORTRESS OF THE 'LEAGUE OF LOST MEN'—A GANG OF JUNGLE BANDITS—
WHAT A DUMMY I AM! WALKED RIGHT INTO IT!
—THE PHANTOM, RETURNING FOR DEVIL, IS TRAPPED IN A DEEP ANIMAL-PIT!
WE GOT HIM!
NOT TOO CLOSE! HE'S GOT GUNS!
STAY BACK FROM THE PIT—IF YOU WANT TO STAY HEALTHY!
THIS'LL HOLD HIM!
THE PIT'S DEEP ENOUGH. HE CAN'T GET OUT WITHOUT WINGS!
PEG DOWN THE ENDS, JUST TO BE SAFE. NOW, SEARCH FOR THE GIRL. SHE CAN'T BE FAR!
The PIT IS COVERED WITH A NET OF HEAVY VINES....
HELEN, TREMBLING WITH FEAR, AWAITS THE RETURN OF THE PHANTOM....
HOW ARE YOU, DEVIL? YOU GOT A HARD BUMP. COME ON, WAG YOUR TAIL. THAT'S THE FELLA. YOU'RE AS GOOD AS NEW.
WHAT'LL WE DO WITH 'EM, NOW WE GOT 'EM, BULL? IT'S WORTH A MAN'S LIFE TO GO DOWN THERE AFTER 'EM.
NOBODY'S GOING DOWN AFTER THEM. JUST LEAVE THEM BE.
THE WOLF—AND THE PHANTOM. THEY'RE BOTH GOING TO GET MIGHTY HUNGRY SOON AND THERE WON'T BE NOTHIN' DOWN THERE TO EAT—EXCEPT EACH OTHER!
Continued—

STOP THAT MAN!
THE COURTYARD SUDDENLY COMES TO LIFE! SOLDIERS RUN TOWARDS HIM, AND THE PHANTOM MOVES FAST. . . .
HE IS UP AND OVER THE WALL IN A FLASH...
AND SOLDIERS POUR THRU THE GATES, HOT ON HIS HEELS!

by the use of a Ben Day dot pattern. There are a few references in the early strips to the effect that Falk actually meant the suit to be gray. When the daily strips began to be reprinted in *Ace Comics*, the costume was colored a light brown. When the Sunday page came along, the suit was rendered in the now familiar purple. Nobody at King Features consulted Falk about this. In Europe the Phantom has also appeared dressed in red.

The Sunday page commenced in late May of 1939. The initial adventure dealt with a gang of woodland extortionists known as the League of Missing Men. The Ghost Who Walks routed them in a continuity that ran for twenty-one weeks, also managing to rescue Helen Thrush and her professor father, who'd come to the jungle to hunt butterflies. The very first Sunday page told again of the origin of the Phantoms, somewhat embellished. Part of this sequence was reprinted in four issues of McKay's ill-fated *Future Comics* in 1940. The final page reprinted in the comic book ends with the Phantom and Helen about to be shot by several of the nastier-looking Leaguers. For those who followed the Phantom only in comic books, this cliffhanger has remained unresolved to this day. When the Sunday pages were added to *King Comics*, starting in #61 (May 1941), the third Sunday continuity was used, leaving a gap of several months.

That third continuity dealt with a spurious Fire Goddess, who was foisted on the easily-gulled jungle tribes by a

The PHANTOM by LEE FALK and RAY MOORE
DEATH TO THE PHANTOM!
INFURIATED BY THE LOSS OF THEIR GOLDEN PRINCESS, THE MOOLI WORK THEMSELVES INTO A FRENZY BEFORE THEIR IDOL!
SUDDENLY, THE PHANTOM APPEARS - AS IF HE HAD DROPPED FROM THE SKY (OR FROM A NEARBY TREE). - DOWN GOES THE FAT CHIEF.
DESTROY HIM, MOOLI-O-MOOLI!
STRIKE THE TRESPASSER DEAD!
THE MOOLI CALL UPON THEIR GOLDEN IDOL!
JUST AS I SUSPECTED! HOLLOW! MOOLI-O-MOOLI YOU'RE A FAKE.
THERE IS A SUDDEN, STUNNED SILENCE AMONG THE WARRIORS!
MOOLI-O-MOOLI HAS FALLEN!
THE PHANTOM IS STRONGER HE CAN NEVER DIE!
AWE-STRICKEN, THE MOOLI WARRIORS BOW BEFORE THE PHANTOM, THE GHOST WHO WALKS! CONT'D.

This is an early Sunday page by Wilson McCoy, even though the logo attributes the art to Ray Moore.

FOR THOSE WHO CAME IN LATE.
400 YEARS AGO, THE LONE SURVIVOR OF A PIRATE RAID... ON A REMOTE BANGALLA SHORE..
ON THE SKULL OF HIS FATHER'S MURDERER, HE SWORE AN OATH... THIS WAS THE FIRST PHANTOM.
TO DEVOTE MY LIFE TO FIGHT PIRACY AND INJUSTICE... MY DESCENDANTS WILL CARRY ON..
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20 GENERATIONS FOLLOWED HIM... IN THE JUNGLE AND ON THE SEVEN SEAS... THEY BELIEVE HIM THE SAME MAN ... IMMORTAL...
PHANTOM... GHOST WHO WALKS... MAN WHO CANNOT DIE...
TODAY... NEMESIS OF EVIL-DOERS EVERYWHERE... HE WORKS ALONE... THE PHANTOM!
FALK & BARRY 4/1

pair of greedy white men. Until the Phantom exposed her as an out-of-work dancer named Manna Day who was being forced to play the part, the majority of jungle tribes abandoned their allegiance to the Ghost Who Walks. Since the Sunday pages were greatly reduced when reprinted in *King*, they were re-lettered and on at least one occasion the dancer's name was spelled Mania. Perhaps more apt.

The 1943 *Phantom* movie serial borrowed part of its plot from this story and featured a Fire Goddess as one of the characters. Long-time cowboy actor Tom Tyler, who'd already portrayed Captain Marvel over at Republic, starred as the Phantom.

Falk had given his mystery man the name Mr. Walker to use when, wearing trench coat, fedora and dark glasses, he needed a civilian identity. The original notion had been that this was an allusion to Ghost Who Walks. By the middle 1940s it was revealed that the family name of all those generations of Phantoms was actually Walker. A long Sunday sequence that began in the summer of 1944 and dealt with the Phantom's childhood gave his full name as Kip Walker, also revealing that he'd first encountered Diana when they were both children. Later his first name was changed to Kit, short for Christopher.

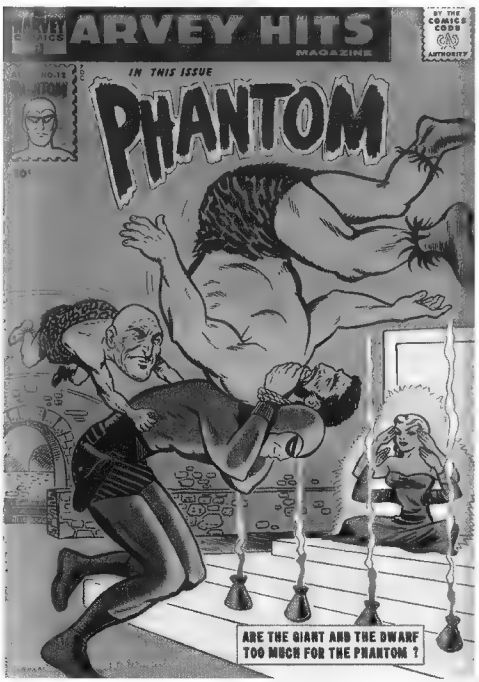
When Ray Moore entered the armed forces in 1942, his assistant and sometime ghost Wilson McCoy took over the drawing of the strip. A former commercial artist, McCoy was definitely not a disciple of Alex Raymond and his simpler, more cartoony style had little resemblance to Moore's. Even so, Ray Moore's name continued to appear on the feature until 1949. After World War II, Moore returned to *The Phantom*, working almost exclusively on the Sunday page until he officially retired in 1949. According to the accepted story, he quit because he was "suffering too much from various wounds." Falk, though, once told me that while Moore was in the service somebody who didn't like him hit him over the head with a monkey wrench and that was what eventually affected his ability to continue drawing.

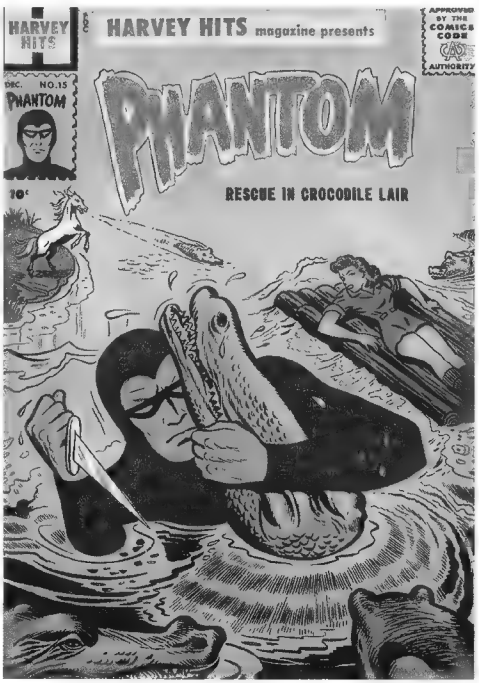
Lee Falk himself worked for the Office of War Information in the early

1940s before joining the Army Signal Corps in 1944. During this latter period he had to get help on the scripts. The writer who ghosted *The Phantom* was Alfred Bester, then turning out pulp science fiction, comic book continuities for DC and scripts for such radio shows as *The Shadow*. He was still several years away from writing *The Demolished Man* and *The Stars My Destination*.

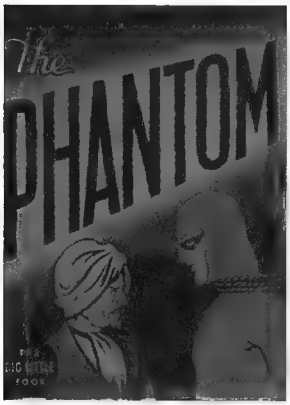
In addition to comic books The Phantom had also branched out into Big Little Books. In fact, he made his first appearance away from the comic section in 1936 in a BLB titled simply *The Phantom*. Five more small fat books followed between 1939 and 1947. The earliest comic book that he had all to himself was #20 in McKay's Feature Books series. A 72-page black and white publication, it hit the stands in December of 1938. Five more FBs appeared between 1940 and 1948, all but the second in full color. Harvey published a half dozen reprint *Phantom* comic books in the 1950s. Since then several publishers have released original material comic books, most recently Moondog.

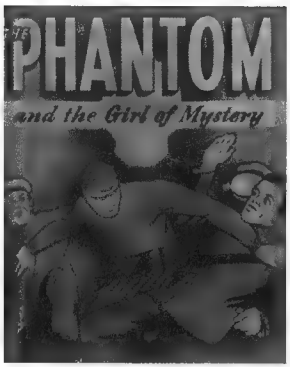
The 1996 Phantom movie, in which Billy Zane donned the purple suit, was not especially beloved by the critics. But, despite its nods to the Indiana Jones series, it captured a lot of the fun, action and humor that Falk had put into the comic strip in its early days—things missing from the somewhat stodgy current version. Not only did the movie have a version of the origin story plus the Singh Brotherhood, it had the Sky Band headed up by (and who better?) Catherine Zeta-Jones.

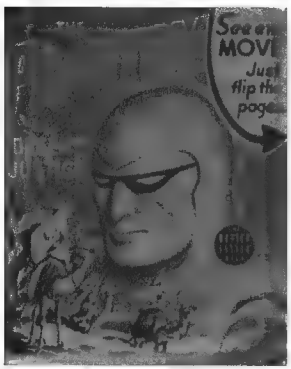


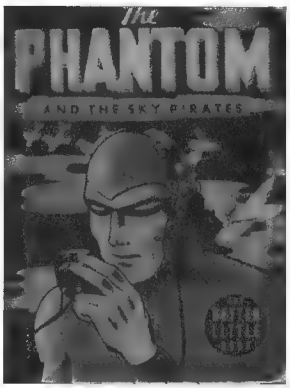


Gradually, as overt Imperialism became less prevalent in the world, Falk modified the political set up in his imaginary African nation. Currently it's a democracy with a black president. The Jungle Patrol, which handles law and order, was introduced in 1951. It wasn't until 1969 that a black man, Colonel Worubu, functioned as commanding







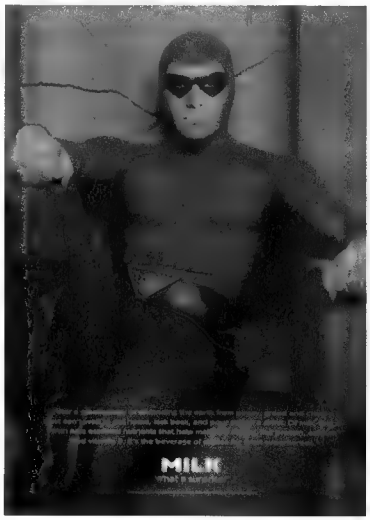


officer. The Phantom still operates, although to a lesser degree, as king of the jungle and he, as the rarely-seen-by-thestaff Unknown Commander, is the true headman of the Jungle Patrol.

Finally late in 1977, after delays and procrastinations that stretched across four decades, Kit Walker and Diana Palmer were wed. Even Mandrake attended the jungle ceremony. The Phantom family added Kit and Heloise, twins, in 1979.

The team that produces the strip has undergone several changes over the years. When McCoy died in 1961, the daily was taken over by Sy Barry and the Sunday, after one trial page by Carmine Infantino wherein the Ghost Who Walks looked very much like a Silver Age DC super-hero, by Bill Ligante. The following spring Barry was also put in charge of the Sunday as well. Lignante later drew several original Phantom comic books for Gold Key.

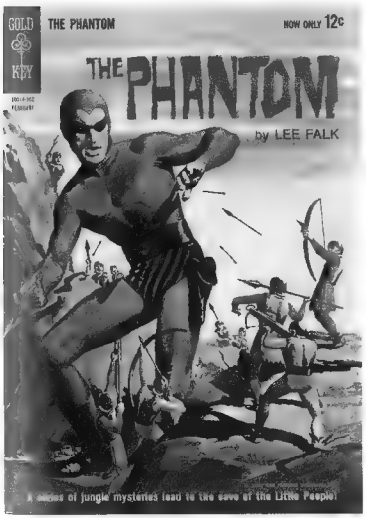
Basically an inker—he'd worked in that capacity for both his brother Dan and for Alex Toth—Sy Barry used a variety of pencilers on the strip. These included Bob Forgione, Andre LeBlanc and George Olesen, all comic book veterans. After Barry retired in 1994, Olesen continued as penciler and worked with assorted inkers. Currently Keith Williams inks the dailies and Graham Nolan, though he shares a credit with Olesen, seems to be solely responsible for the Sunday sagas. Since Lee Falk died in 1999, no writer credit has appeared. According to Todd Goldberg, subsequent continuities were adapted from stories that originally appeared in Scandinavian comic books. The current scripts are being written by Tony DePaul.

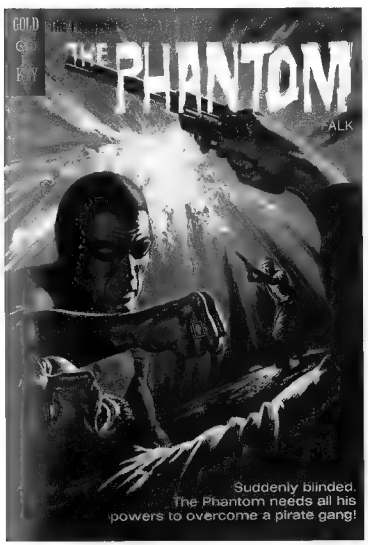


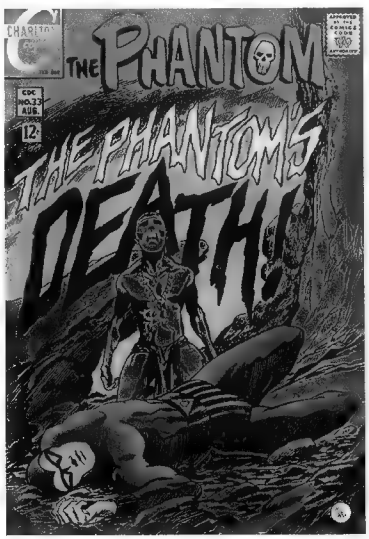
While still quite popular in Europe, *The Phantom* strip has fallen on lean days in the United

States. Currently it appears in a total of eighteen papers here and only a few of those in major cities. Falk was always a favorite in Scandinavia and the strip still appears in over eighty newspapers in those countries, as well as in original-material comic books. The strip appears in exactly one paper in Africa, a French language publication in Tunisia.

Ron Goulart's latest book is Comic Book Encyclopedia *from HarperEntertainment. In the early 1970s, he wrote six of the Avon Phantom paperbacks under the penname Frank S. Shawn. He got to know Falk in that period and found him a dapper, gentlemanly fellow much closer in appearance and manner to Mandrake than to the Ghost Who Walks. He interviewed him a couple of times but could never get him to admit that he'd ever read a pulp magazine.*







Marketplace Mail

[continued from page 9]

It does seem, however, as though the ending has been forced (not saying by you). I know of the "Internet" access. That's all well and good but *nothing* compared to the book in your hand. Thanks for some great issues. Regards,

Eric Koppi
via email

If there was ever a time for a gasp, this is it: Gasp, the end of *Comic Book Marketplace*! I have been a devout reader since the early days and have enjoyed every single issue. Of course, being an old collector of the ECs (going back to the late 1940s) with the Bible stories, Blackstone and Moon Girl, through the New Trend, New Direction, *MAD* and all the way up to the end with the illustrated Picto-Fiction, I had them all and I bought them brand new off the shelf at the comic book store I worked at in Northern Maine. So, issues 80, 87, 91 and 98 which deal with the EC comics are of special interest to me. So are the issues that dealt with the Spirit or Eisner or The Shadow or Captain Marvel or the Carl Barks interpretation of the world of Disney's characters. I loved them all.

Over the years there have been many magazines that brought the world of comic books, their artists and publishing companies to their readers, but none, in my opinion, hit the mark so many times as did yours. The reason for this is clear. Your own love of the American form of comic art and your lifetime devotion to it made the difference. You made sure that your readers had the best and I thank you for it.

I could rattle on, issue after issue, pointing out all the articles that I liked but I would end up listing almost all of them. Instead, let me say that I have been well informed and entertained by your magazine. I will miss it.

John L. Hone
Laurel, MD

P.S. I even liked how you numbered both the May and June 2004 editions as "No. 112." Just like the old days when the comic companies did it and have confused collectors ever since.

Dr. Scott McAdam
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To whom it may concern: It has been said that rock and roll music and the comic strip or comic book are the only two art forms that are truly original to America.

Well, there is a tradition that is long dead in many aspects of its true origins. That is the apprenticeship relationship that existed between a man (or woman) who had mastered a certain skill or discipline and the young charge who he (or she) took under their wing and taught their art to keep it alive for future generations. This goes back to the origins of history. I was one of those apprentices in my early days of comics.

I have chronicled in past reports some of the origins of my love of comics, as a business and a hobby, but not really as an art form. Like all young boys I discovered super-heroes in my earliest days of comic fandom and reading. Incredibly strong men with bright, flashy costumes saving humanity from the Bad Guys, be they powerful, sinister, revengeful, or sadistic. That did not matter, because the age-old struggle between good and evil existed in a way that even us youngsters could understand—maybe not in a sophisticated way, where we could compare them to the eternal struggles of famous, classic literature. Superman vs. Lex Luthor was not as ephemeral as Ahab vs. the White Whale, but I had not yet read *Classics Illustrated* at that time!

Not long after the Superhero-phase, I discovered Golden Age or at least stuff that is older than me, which ironically is now the cut-off date for anything I consider old in comics, 1962. I still remember my first Golden Age comic, *Blue Bolt* #102 for $3. Looking back at it now there is absolutely nothing special about that book, but there was at that moment, for *me*. Although I could not afford better Golden Age in 1976, I did get to see it since I worked for a fan of vintage stuff at a comic book stand at the Hayward Alameda County Flea Market, Kerry Lawless. Although my pay, $5 a day (in trade, I might add) never afforded me the luxury of getting anything good, I still amassed a nice stash of old comics.

I will never forget my first big show, Bay-Con 1977. It was a three-day extravaganza in July that year. I worked all Thursday at Kerry's house to get him ready for the show. Putting his entire stock in order and pulling out any extra copies that overstuffed the boxes, re-bagging stuff to look its best and generally getting paid to play with comics. $10 in trade that day, because it was far more work than just watching the comic stand and helping customers find what they were looking for on weekends. And I remember the momentous task of spending my $10 in trade. It came down to an *Action* #100 (atomic explosion cover) in FN for $8 (4, 8, 12 in *Guide* at the time) or *Captain Marvel's Whiz Comics* #123 in FN+ for $7 (3, 6, 9 at that time). Here is another one of those eternal struggles and some of you will be happy and some will be mad, but at that moment I decided I like The Big Red Cheese better than the Man of Steel.

The opportunity of this convention afforded me exciting thrills and devastating disappointment all at the same time, because I got to go to the Con on Thursday night, but my parents insisted on going to the little house we owned an hour away that weekend, which had belonged to my grandparents before my father bought it, instead of me getting to work the show for three days. I think I told my parents in no uncertain terms that I hated them, they did not love me and that I was in some way abused, if I remember correctly.

So here I am carrying in the thick, plywood boxes that held Kerry's comics to his table. A few hours later was every boys' dream, I got to look around the show. Let me tell you, I was 14 and I had $2 to spend, but that did not matter at that time. Being the incredibly great shopper that I have always been, I found a guy with trunks full of 1950s stuff for 25 cents each. My gem of the day was an *Action* #207 (Olympic medals on the cover). Wow! A 1955 Superman comic for a quarter, I was in heaven. But, alas, we had to go and I did not get to come back that weekend.

A few years skip by and in 1979 I meet one of my best friends and long-time mentor, John Watson. Our meeting is a story of monumental proportions, but too long for this reminiscence, so ask me at a con sometime. He taught me a lot about how to grade, how to look carefully at a book (in light at a diagonal so you can see the entire surface of the comic reflected toward your eye), and generally a contagious love for old comics that has never died. Not long after our meeting (11/15/79), John opened The Comic Shop in San Leandro. At the time, the only place between Oakland, CA and San Jose. Needless to say not long after that I went to work there and it was cool.

Honestly, there are too many people that have influenced me in my years of comic-ing, but their legacy will live on

through me, as long as I can keep it alive. I mentioned a few in my last article, but a few more names to note are Dick Swan (The Big Guy); John Wharton, a good friend and long-time comic and vintage paperback fan and dealer; Bob Beerbaum, then owner of Best of Two Worlds (from the mid '70s to early '90s in the SF Bay Area) and one of the most knowledgeable comic people I have met; Hal Verb, Old "Near Mint Hal" as we called him, who was a dinosaur in the Bay Area; John Clemons who owned the second store I worked at, The Comic Zone in Fremont, CA; and last but not least, Grant West, who helped me build Treasures of Youth by Scott when I opened in 1994 and I have known since 1976 and am still very, very close friends with to this day. He fell to the dark side of the force—art collecting and I affectionately deemed him "Cover Lad," since he loves the Legion of Super-heroes so much.

OK, now those of you who have read my reports know that there is a point just around the corner and here it comes, soon I think.

With the way the comic book market is today and the fact that the average age of a comic fan continues to get older and older as time goes by, I have become disheartened to know that the apprenticeship relationship has truly died as we know it in the field of vintage comic book. It actually pains me to think that there is no 14-18 year old, like I was at that age, dying to soak up the knowledge about the history of comics like I did 25-30 years ago. I discovered many of the things I know by being in the places I worked. Looking through collections of vintage stuff that came through my hands, whether I actually owned them or not. Discovering the difference between Carl Barks and nearly every other Duck artist of the 1940s - early '80s. Looking through 1940s and 1950s books and learning how to identify Atlas' (and other publishers') artists (which is why I always like to look at an Atlas comic from the back to the front to see if I can tell who the artist is before I get to the splash page of the story).

While I worked for John at the Comic Shop we did have a few young proteges who came in as customers and became employees of John's store, but more importantly they became our friends. Both of which opened their own stores eventually. Long before I did, even though they were three and six years younger than I was. Bob Kries opened Bobby the K's Comic Depot in 1987 (I think, maybe 1986) and Mike Cresser opened Crush Comics in 1990. I can honestly say that they both learned a lot from me over the years and I could have been partly instrumental in their love of comics, but not in the success of their businesses. I always like to say that I taught Mike everything he knows, but that is a lie. I am pretty sure I taught him a lot about comics, but it would probably be more accurate to say that he learned a lot of from being around us when he was a teenager. John Watson, Bob Kries, Steve Wyatt and I were influences on him, but none of us ever taught him how to be a successful business owner. He learned that on his own, GOOD JOB, MIKE (CRUSH).

I feel like a man writing out his last will and testament, hoping the world will somehow remember him for something he did or said. I think what I really want is to know that there will always be someone young that will look at a new (or newer) comic and wonder about the old artists or the old comics. Romance, western, horror, war, crime, teen humor, funny animal and many other genres of comics are like dinosaurs, extinct in today's comic book world.

Comic Book Marketplace has always been a place that preserved those important parts of our heritage and legacy for collectors to keep the flame burning. I hate to use this analogy, but it reminds a little of the movie *Elf*. Santa's sled was powered by belief, people believing in Santa Claus was what fueled his ability to do his job. Well, people caring about and believing in the historical significance of our hobby is what will fuel future generations carrying on the tradition that we have started.

The comic book industry is young in the true sense of art forms. Well over 100+ years for comic strips in the newspaper; 150-200 for editorial cartoons and caricatures of political figures; about 100 years for placing these treasures in book form; and 71 years for the process of binding with staples and glue in the phenomena of the comic book, itself.

Our first pioneers have been dying over the last half century or so, many of the golden age legends just in the recent past. Artist, writers, editors, publishers have left us for the big bullpen in the sky. Men (and a few women) who have left a, hopefully, undying legacy for future generations to cherish as we have during this first 45 years of organized comic book fandom.

I think the thing that pains me the most is that I will not get to truly perform the mentor role, like the friends who passed on to me the passion which I have for the funny books I so dearly love.

As I said in my last report, a few issues ago, I am studying to be a middle school math teacher and I will have to satisfy my need to mentor by waxing philosophically to my math students and hope that they do not fall asleep, as some of you might have done already.

Thanks, *CBM*! Thanks, Gary, for starting this mag with your passion for comics! Thanks, Steve, for seeing that it needed to be kept alive back when you helped revive it! Thanks, Michael Naiman, for helping keep it alive with these market reports. And thanks to every man and woman that ever penned a story, penciled a page, inked it afterward, lettered, colored, edited, printed and most affectionately to the men who said "Hey, I bet we could bind that up cheaply and sell it for 10 cents."

Some day I would love to get my real doctorate on the topic of the historical significance of comics and how their effect on society has changed over each passing decade as TV, video games, the Internet, and other things have stripped the old (and new) comic book of its importance in our society. In my greeting

at the beginning of this I put To Whom It May Concern—well, I hope and pray to God that it concerns a hell of a lot more people than *buy* this magazine.

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There's an old joke that in order to make a million dollars in publishing; all you have to do is spend three million. This joke became reality when the assets of CrossGen were recently sold in bankruptcy court for a flat one million dollars, which will offset only a fraction of the company's debts. The loss of CrossGen was a blow to my monthly sales, since they were solidly my #3 selling publisher.

That the comics industry is a difficult business was made more apparent with the recent collapse of Dreamwave. Just a couple of years ago, their first issue of *Transformers Generation One* went through several printings and was easily the top selling comic of the year.

And the financial troubles of Marvel are well documented, with highly lucrative movie releases providing the revenues to finally pull the company back into the black.

Now you hold in your hands the last issue of the *Comic Book Marketplace*. It's been a great run, and a wonderful magazine. When the news was announced, my customers lamented over its loss. It's a sad event, but business is business.

2004 started like 2003, with high hopes. Expectations of crowds swarming into comic stores after being exposed to comics through theatrical releases never materialized. While overall sales were up slightly for the industry as a whole, for myself and a number of other retailers, 2004 saw a slight decline in overall sales. Chain bookstores, offering discounts and earlier release dates, cut into the newly burgeoning Manga market, siphoning off sales.

But it's not all bad news. 2005 has started well. I've got an aggressive television ad campaign running, with local cable ads on *Stargate SG1* and *Atlantis*, plus *Justice League Unlimited*. Statewide ads are running on *Star Trek: Enterprise*. So far the results have been great, with a large number of new faces entering the doors.

The *Justice League Unlimited* ads have been especially effective. Over the last six months I've seen a rapid increase in youthful customers, thanks largely to the widening selection of All-Ages material now being offered by Marvel and DC. This product has been key to satisfying the new customers when they visit.

The interest in comics is definitely there. For my marketplace, the industry took a wrong turn when publishers, like Marvel during the tenure of Bill Jemas, concentrated on primarily making superhero comics targeted at mature readers. There are over 60 million potential readers in America under the age of 18. That's a pretty huge market to abandon. The return of these customers, and having product to meet their demands, is a very strong positive and a giant stride in the right direction. It's only been a matter of months since the Marvel Age line was launched, but I'm seeing positive results already.

I've said it before, and I'll repeat it now; I think 2005 will be a very good year for the overall comics industry.

In **Key Sales**: Black and white Marvel magazines continue to sell quickly for me. *Savage Sword of Conan* #2 VG + $15.50, along with *Kull and the Barbarians* #1 (Michael Whelans 1st published cover art) VF+ $15 and several other similar issues sold the day I got them in.

Marvel Silver Age remains, as always, in strong demand: *Fantastic Four* #17 FN $77.75; *Incredible Hulk* #340 NM $17.50; *Tales of Suspense* #26 GD+ $32, #28 GD $18; *Wolverine* (vol. 1) #2 NM $33, (vol. 2) #10 VF $18.

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In the "Please Play That Sad Hulk Music" category, we must bid farewell to *Comic Book Marketplace*. Although our first report was in *CBM* #84, I have read since #1 and appreciate the early efforts of Gary Carter and have since enjoyed working with the Magnificent Michael Naiman, as well as Angela Meyer and Russ Cochran himself! I especially liked the Alex Schomburg and DC Ashcan issues, and of course Thank you for the "missing" Gerber stickers! Goodnight, Sweet Prince!

On the heels of the Third Annual Emerald City Comicon (ECCC), things are looking very well here at Comics4Kids! The response our booth got at the show (including commitments from Tim Sale and Canada's David Finch) was phenomenal and Thank you again to the Demonakos family for having us there!

Also Thank you to all those involved with the Second Annual Dam60 CGC Forum Philanthropy Drive!! We hope this will become "The" Post-San Diego show event!

Additionally, we will open Miller_Mart on eBay, as we pool our resources to bring Frank Miller books to the masses at a reasonable price, to raise money for Comics4Kids!

Speaking ofwhich, without any Miller, there really is no Elektra. *But*, the *Sin City* movie looks awfully tantalizing, and will break records for sure. Another trailer worth talking about is *The*

Fantastic Four and while we're on that note wait till you see the trailers for *Ghost Rider*, bringing the buzz up to a deafening ROAR!! And of course Comics4Kids fully endorses The Rock as Prince Namor of Atlantis! 'Nuff Said!

Golden Age: Most requested are *Green Lantern* and *All-Flash*; saw some activity with *Beautiful Horror* comics. Also *Action Comics*, *Detective Comics*, *Batman* and *Superman* each under #100. *All-American* #16 is on the move, as well as *Playboy Magazine* #1 (Dec 1953) with several copies in the GD to FN range at $1,000 to $3,000 respectively. Feature Books' *How it Began* GD $25; April 1933 *Fortune* Magazine several copies GD to NM with prices ranging from $20 to $175. Many bargains in the DC camp while Timelys are pushing the envelope for investors.

Silver Age: Most requested are *Amazing Fantasy* #15 and *Adventure Comics* #247 in any grade. *Amazing Spider-Man* #50 VF $400; *Action* #267 VG $250; *Avengers* #1 FN $700; *Brave and the Bold* #28 GD $350, #29 GD $120, #30 GD $60; *Captain America* #100 VF $500; *Daredevil* #1 FN $400; *Four Color* #386 GD $200; *Flash* #105 VG $800; *Iron Man* #1 VF $700, VG $150; *JLA* #1 VG $500, VG $600; *My Greatest Adventure* #80 VG $90. Seeing greater quantities of File Copies showing up for Dell titles, a mass infusion here on the West Coast.

Bronze Age: *Amazing Spider-Man* #100 VG $100, FN $190, VG $160, VG $140, VG $125; run #85-120, #123-135 Avg VG $751; *Incredible Hulk* #181 NM $1,300, VF $800, VG $200, VG $100 (MVS out), GD $75; *Cerebus* #1 FN $400, NM $160 (disclosed CF), #8 NM $90, #9 NM $90, #12 NM $100; *Giant-Size X-Men* #1 VF $1,150, GD $100; *Twilight Zone* #84 FN $104 (1st Gold Key Miller), #85 FN $79 (2nd Gold Key Miller); *Marvel Spotlight* #2 VG $40, VG $30, #5 NM $600, VF $350, FN $175, VG $100; *Daredevil* #168 VF $100; *Iron Fist* #14 FN $70; *Conan the Barbarian* #1 VF+ $240; *Batman* #234 VF $250. Most requested are lesser known Bronze Age #1s in High Grade; *Strange Tales* #115 in any grade; Wrightson High Grade issues; Batman with Joker appearances; and *X-Men* #s 94 to 137. Special Thanks to our friend John Munn at Comic Book, Ink in Tacoma, Washington and at the Seattle show (ECCC) Howard's Comics and RDA Treasures.

"Modern Comics should be sold as close to *Guide* as possible!" reports a trusted source, promoting a strategy of combining the *Wizard*, *Overstreet*, and *CBG* prices and averaging them. While we leave you to bandy about that thought, here is the meat of the modern animal:

HOT: *Daredevil* volume 2; *SHI: Tourbook* (Tucci Sketch book); *NYX Catwoman* (Balent); *New Avengers*; *Alpha Flight* v.1 #s 1-12; *Astonishing X-Men TMNT* #s 1-10; Identity Crisis *Green Lantern: Rebirth*; *Faust* (1st prints); *Cry For Dawn*; *Superman/Batman*; *Fathom*; *Hellboy* and (most) trade paperbacks!!

Recent sales: *NYX* #3 $45; *JBNM* #21 $35; *Flaming Carrot* #1 (comic) $55; *Faust* #12 $25; *Bite Club* set #1-6 $30 (looking forward to the sequel, as announced by the upwardly mobile and *extremely talented* artist David Hahn of Mercury Studios/DC Comics).

Cooling off are "Wanted" issues, though I really dug the whole "Fight Club" mentality and Millar's shaking his money maker that really PO-ed a great many readers! Work it, own it, Girl! Also slowing is *Supreme Power*, again still a DY-NO-MITE! read, falling in the secondary turn. Issue 14 has a villain throwing civilians at Mark Milton! AAAIIIIIEEE! (squish) Make Mine Marvel Max!

Rick's Comix

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My luck—I get to contribute and it's the last issue! What the hey! We're a different type of store—we have attitude! #1: If it's *slabbed*, it will probably *always* be slabbed and *never* read—*unless* it didn't receive an Ultra High Grade as hoped for *or* it was restored! and got a Purple Label! BOOOooooo! Then it will be popped-out and resubmitted until it has a Blue Label! This *does* happen! Our walk-ins stay away from the slabbed stuff—they want to read these things!

If your book is not by Carl Barks, Don Rosa, John Buscema, Byrne, Romita, Stan Lee, etc. *and* in top notch condition! Forget it! And *always* remember this!: *You can't go to your local comic shop and CA$H in your comic(s) like a check! No matter what the value*!

Also, if you think you have a killer collection! There is always one better on eBay for less money!!!! Don't kid yourself. Think *real—be real*! This stuff is for *fun*! If it's *not fun*, you spent too much for the *wrong stuff*! Buy what you like! If it goes up in value, consider it a *bonus*!

Recent Sales: *Sparkler Comics* #6 FN $85; *Superman* #234 FN+ $10; *WDC&S* #61 FN+ $70, #76 VF- $101; *Bite Me Comix* #1 VF (early UG title) $24; *Young Allies* #17 VG- $110; *Uncle Scrooge* #1 (*FC* #386) FN+ $210, #24 (Xmas cover—hard to find in high grade) VF- $105, #64 VF- (Vietnam War story) $75.

Jamie Newbold

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This is the last issue of *CBM*. I'm sorry it did not reach the earlier success it held in the collector's market. Much valuable information filled its pages over the years and it will always be known as a reference tool for serious back issue collectors. Although our contributions to

the magazine have come to an end, we are still around! Visit us at our store in San Diego, or shop from our website at www.socalcomics.com.

Golden Age: *Adventure Comics* #210 CGC 6.5 $1050; *Battle Ground* #2 VG $22; *Captain Midnight* #40 FN+ $115; *Feature Comics* #134 FN $35; *Fight Against Crime* #5 VG $32; *Jungle Comics* #125 FN $59; *Looney Tunes* #17 F/VF $210; *Mad* #9 FN- $136; *Remember Pearl Harbor* nn FN+ $200; *Submariner* #36 GD $90; *Tarzan's Jungle Annual* #4 F/VF $44; *World's Finest* #3 FA $165.

Silver Age: *Amazing Spider-Man* #39 F/VF $250; *Avengers* #74 NM- $40; *Daredevil* #17 VF $78; *Fantastic Four* #10 VG $170, #11 VG+ $175, #20 F/VF $210; *Flash* #113 FN+ $165, #119 FN $75; *Green Lantern* #42 VF+ $75; *Hawkman* #13 VF $55; *Hulk* #6 F/VF $824; *Iron Man* #11 NM- $60; *Journey Into Mystery* #83 GD $500; *Justice League of America* #18 FN+ $77; *Land of the Giants* #4 VF/NM $40; *Magnus Robot Fighter* #3 VF+ $88, #10 VF $46; *Star Spangled War* #126 VF- $62; *X-Men* #5 VG+ $95, #9 VG/F $95, #18 F/VF $82.

Bronze Age: *Amazing Spider-Man* #110 VF/NM $52, #129 NM- $500; *Marvel Feature* #11 VF/NM $48; *Uncanny X-Men* #111 NM- $60, #116 VF $40, #121 CGC 9.6 NM $220, #123 NM- $35, #133 NM- $35, #135 VF/NM $75, #137 NM- $45.

Modern Age: *Incredible Hulk* #340 VF $24, *Wolverine* (1988) #1 CGC 7.5 VF- $35.

Bob Storms
www.higradecomics.com

With the last issue of *CBM* it's sad to see another great "paper" publication go away. With the Internet and the ease of pick and clickers it seems like 24 hours is old news.

With CGC encapsulating books into plastic I always wondered did people actually care to read the book anymore. Have comic books become the debit cards of this collecting community? Worse, I have seen some books sold so many times it's as if they had some kind of social disease. Does the book have a bad reputation? I know that high-grade collectors are label driven, I know that many want the "virgin copy," but did they care about what was inside? What made them pay multiples of *Guide*? The story, the art, or the cover?

The back issue market has been very exciting the last year, pre-1965 high grade material has been very difficult to acquire. Keys are priced very aggressively and, quite frankly, I'm not sure how many years ahead some people are pricing this stuff. I have seen some dealers price a book so that they can keep it on their wall. I'm not sure what business model that follows since I never charged admission to look at a book on my wall.

Ebay has been very much a "wholesale" market, which I think has to do with the fact that many people out there *cannot* grade raw books. God forbid a seller who grades lists a raw book for sale. Automatically his bids are "factored" lower by the assumption that *all* eBay sellers cannot grade. In addition there are so many scams going on with stolen scans, fraudulent listings and dubious sellers that when a key does come up for sale it's automatically dismissed unless you know the guy selling the book. I have had at least two to three instances of my books being listed on eBay with stolen scans.

Lastly, I would like to thank *CBM* for their great articles, great stories and enlightening me to genres that I would never have bothered to check out.

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The Marvel comics published between April and August 1976 with 30 cent variant cover price and from June-October 1977 with 35-cent variant cover price continue to sell for amazing premiums despite their serious undervaluation in the *Guide*.

When I published my findings of these books, of which there are almost 400, in *CBM*'s #51, 55 and 66, much collector interest began to take hold. At the August 1999 Overstreet Advisor's meeting, which I attended in Baltimore, Maryland, I made a brief presentation to the fifty or so advisors who were present, many of whom arrogantly dismissed their significance and argued that they would not bring the high prices that I predicted based upon the age-old collectibles principle of scarcity and demand.

Now, years later, hundreds of sales at tremendous multiples of *Guide* have been recorded and the desirability of these particular books is inarguable. The prices in the *Guide* have remained ridiculously low, but with each passing year, as dealers do take possession of the books and sell them for amounts vastly above *Guide* value, I believe their inevitable true valuations will have to be reflected.

The thirty-five cent Marvel variants are far scarcer than their 30-cent counterparts. Even today, *Amazing Spider-Man* #169-73 lists at a ludicrous $20 each in 9.2 NM- with the regular 30-cent edition valued at $15 in the same grade. These books, on the rare occasions that they change hands, have brought and continue to bring $500 in 8.0 VF and $800 to $1,000 in VF/NM grade, which is 40-50 times current *Guide* value. Similarly, *X-Men* #105-07 35-cent variants bring the same money in the same grade as *Amazing Spider-Man* but are listed at $105 in 9.2 NM- with regular 30-cent editions listed at $70 each in 9.2 as well. In the case of the *X-Men*, the variants sell at ten times *Guide* which is less ridiculous than the *Spider-Man* example, selling for 50 times *Guide*. In October 2004 an eBay auction of *Kid Colt* #218 35-cent variant in VG sold for $724, which is 181 times the *Guide* value of $4 or 18,100% of *Guide* value!

I predict that the *Spider-Man* and *X-Men* comics will be in the top ten Bronze

Age comics for value and that in particular, *Iron Fist* #14 35-cent variant (first appearance of Sabretooth) will reach the top four Bronze Age books ever published and may one day even out-perform *Incredible Hulk* #181, *Giant Sized X-men* #1 and *X-Men* #94. *Star Wars* #1, a 35-cent variant, which is among the most common of the 35-cent variants, and which has sold in excess of #3,500 in NM grade despite its relative low valuation, is listed in the *Guide* at a mere $7.50 in NM-.

Recent sales: *All Star* #14 FA+ $125, #5 FN- $1000; *Captain America* #11 F/VF CGC 7.0 $1800; *Capt. Marvel Jr.* #2 G/VG $200; *Captain Marvel Adventures* #19 FN- $175, #17 VG $150; *Special Edition Comics* #1 FA- $300; *World's Best* #1 GD $1500.

I have discovered a number of other interesting unknown items of a variant nature which I hope to one day publish in a different comics publication as this is the last issue of *CBM*. It's been fun.

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It is with heavy heart that I write this market report. I have been informed that it is to run in the final issue of my favorite magazine: *Comic Book Marketplace*. I have been reading *CBM* since the beginning, and a subscriber since issue #10, and it is sad to think that there aren't enough serious comic fans like myself to support such a great publication. I gather that *CBM* and the *Overstreet Comic Price Review* magazine are going to merge, and become an online publication.

The market remains strong for quality back issue comics and comic book art. Here are just a few highlights from the last couple of months, beginning with some of the **"slabbed" comics** sold: *Battlestar Galactica* #1 (1978) CGC 9.6 $48; *Captain America* #62 CGC 8.0 $1430; *Comic Cavalcade* #1 CGC 4.0 $1530; *Fantastic Four* #12 CGC 3.5 $294, #38 CGC 7.5 $102; *Great Comics* #1 (1945) CGC 8.5 $210; *Green Lantern* #65 CGC 9.2 $135; *Incredible Hulk* #181 CGC 9.4 $2300; *Marvel Superheroes Secret Wars* #8 CGC 9.8 $91; *Savage Sword of Conan* #1 CGC 9.6 $440; *Solar* #1 (Valiant) CGC 9.8 $93; *Space 1999* #1 (Mag) CGC 9.2 $110; *Spider-Woman* #1 (1978) CGC 9.6 $59; *Startling Comics* #46 CGC 7.5 $600; *Wonder Woman* #2 CGC 7.0 $2050.

Plenty of **unslabbed** old comics have also found new homes recently, including the following: *Adventures Into the Unknown* #22 VG $40; *Batman* #40 VG $240; *Crime Patrol* #8 GD/VG $40; *G. I. Combat* #87 VG $237, #90 VG $31; *Marvel Spotlight* #2 VG $32; *Silver Surfer Fireside Novel* HC $80; *Tales Of Terror* #1 VG $60; *Two-Fisted Tales* #38 VG- $26; *Vault Of Horror* #20 FR $26.

The market for comic production art continues to expand. It seems that more and more comic fans are finding enjoyment with ownership of the unique material that created the beloved little illustrated magazines we all love! Here is just some of the artwork we sold lately: *All New Comics* #9 story page Joe Kubert line art $250; *Amazing Adventures* #20 & 21 Cover Proofs $75 each; *Astonishing Tales* #22 Cover Proof $68; *Conan* #39 Cover Proof $98; *DC Challenge* #3 story page Infantino line art $100; *Dead of Night* #2 Cover Proof $57; *House of Secrets* #85 Approval Cover (Signed: Neal Adams) $160; *Justice League of America* #70 Approval Cover (Signed: Adams) $185; *Leave It to Binky* #64 Hand-Colored Cover Art $120; *Little Brother Hugo* Comic Strip Art Sept. 1955 $50; *Metamorpho* #17 Approval Cover $119; *Rai* #0 Page 19 line art $160; *Rawhide Kid* #75 Larry Lieber story page line art $100; *Rima* #1 Cover Four-Color Separation $250; *Superboy* #189 Hand-Colored Cover Art $150; *Sword of Sorcery* #4 Hand-Colored Cover Art $140; *Tales of the Unexpected* #104 Approval Cover (Signed: Adams) $160; *X-O Manowar* #9 Page 13 line art $135.

Note that the DC approval covers, hand-colored covers, and four-color separations mentioned above are all from the Jack Adler pedigree, which remains very hot with those who trade comics and art to us. I anticipate comic production art will continue to gain appeal and value in the future, due to its intrinsic art value and the great sense of satisfaction that only true rarities can provide their lucky owner!

Perhaps I will be writing to you all again, in the future, if my service is requested by the future incarnation of the "late, great, *Comic Book Marketplace*." Until then, best of luck in all your collecting endeavors.

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Like many other long time collectors (meaning people who actually read their old funny books) I will miss *CBM*. Not only was the magazine a trip down memory lane each month, it was informative and educational. From the well written articles to the many wonderful full color cover reproductions it was a "must have" each month. Even though I have collected vintage comic books for 42 years I would inevitably find various tidbits of information in each issue that informed (and sometime surprised) me. A serious void will be left with the absence of this magazine. It is more important now than at any time that new arrivals in our hobby be informed via interesting and enjoyable articles that comic books are fun to read and even more fun to collect and hold on to.

The periodicals that remain in our hobby sold out long ago to the silly

investor/speculator crowd and offer little of value in regard to collecting and enjoying comic books. It is important that a new collector understands that there is much more to our hobby than profit and speculation. *CBM* was able to get that message across time and again. I will miss the wonderful articles by Michelle Nolan (is there anyone who knows more about the hobby in general?) and the accurate "Market Report" by Michael Naiman. I will miss Will Murray. Although they have all but disappeared in recent years, I will miss the wonderful ads offering vintage pieces that were so prominent before the advent of eBay and the Internet.

Why wasn't the circulation higher on this wonderful magazine? If every silly ass who wasted money on a slabbed book had been a subscriber to *CBM* I am certain that the mag could have gone on forever. Unfortunately that was not the case. Only those of us who actually read and enjoy our old comic books looked forward to *CBM* each month. The hobbyists in our field understood. The investor/speculator crowd didn't have a clue. Too bad there were not more collectors who made *CBM* a staple of their monthly purchases. What does this speak for the future of our hobby?

I would like to thank Gary and Lisa Carter for originating *CBM* those many years ago. I would like to thank Michael Naiman for the terrific job he did as the voice of reason over the years. I would like to thank Russ for his recent efforts and Steve for hanging in there as long as he did. I am thankful that I do have 121 wonderful issues to look back on and re-read at any time. Thank for many years of fun *CBM*. That is all I have ever asked from my hobby—to entertain me. Long live vintage comic book readers!

Sales are below average at the store this winter. No doubt that the Internet has played a big part in this. I know of many customers that used to purchase old comics from myself and other Orlando area stores that now sit on their ass at home and satisfy their collecting needs through various Internet auction houses. These same collectors don't bother to attend what few local comic book conventions are left. The lack of over-the-counter activity has made many of us shift gears and direct our energy in other directions. It is clear to see that if this trend continues there will be few if any independent comic book stores left who concentrate on the sales of pre-1970 comics. No one needs the headaches and overhead of a retail location if all they are going to sell their product over the Internet. The next couple of years will be interesting. It may come to the point that all that is left for shopping is Wal-Mart and the Internet. I hope not.

Silver Age 1955-1969: We were able to sell many low- to mid-grade early Marvels this month. Demand continues for first appearances and origin issues. DC sells well and is much harder to replace than Marvel. Gold Key, Archie, Charlton and Dell move sporadically.

Sales: *Amazing Spider-Man* #3 VG $400; *Batman* #200 NM $175; *Brave & Bold* #30 VF $450; *Fantastic Four* #8 FN $375; *Hulk* #3 GD $135; *Lois Lane* #1 FA $295; *Life With Archie* #1 VG $100; *Showcase* #37 VG $275; *Tales of Suspense* #39 VG $750; *Uncle Scrooge* #20 FN $30.

Golden Age 1935-1955: We were very fortunate to purchase a nice group of 40 Timely comics last month. These wartime books always move well. I also bought strong runs of 1940s *Batman, Detective* and *World's Finest.*

Sales: *Archie* #3 GD $250; *Batman* #7 VG/FN $900; *Capt Marvel Jr.* #1 VG $950; *Detective* #39 VG $750; *Marvel Mystery* #20 FA $150; *Superman* #14 GD $300; *World's Finest* #2 GD $500.

Not much is happening in the **Artwork** or **Toy** field this past month. We were able to purchase no collections. We have steady inquiries regarding early Barbies and GI Joe dolls, Capt Action and Aurora kits. Comic character toys pre-1965 are hard for us to come by. Once again our sales in this area have been impacted by the wonderful Internet. Our Disneyana sales have dropped off in recent months due to Internet activity. Hopefully the across-the-counter customers will return at some point.

Sales: Corgi Batmobile in box 1966 $250; Disneyland 1958 guidebook $40; *Flintstones* TV cel $50; Mummy Aurora model kit in box $300; 1958 Zorro lunchbox $75.

That will wrap us up for this month. Have a good late winter. If visiting the Walt Disney World area please stop by and say hello.

Terry's Comics

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I have to say that I was very surprised to hear of the pending demise of this wonderful magazine, the *Comic Book Marketplace*, which you are now holding in your hands. I don't understand how, in the midst of what I consider a boom time for vintage comics, the flagship magazine that best illustrates the greatness of those vintage comics can be allowed to end.

I remember seeing so many covers of rare Golden Age comics for the first time in the *CBM*, comics that I had previously only heard about. I distinctly recall driving from Los Angeles to Oakland on the way to Wonder-Con in Terry's van many years ago, looking through *CBM* and marveling at the picture of *Catman* #13, which I had previously never seen. I can only hope that some enterprising soul takes *CBM* over and carries on this great periodical. It definitely fills a void.

As to the market, January 2005 started out with a bang for us at the Philadelphia Comic-Con, my local show. In a master stroke of genius, mega-promoter Derek Woywood has moved the show to the Ramada Inn in Essington, Pennsylvania, which is located near the Philadelphia International Airport. Not only is this a much better locale, but because the show is now outside the city limits of Philadelphia, we no longer have to

contend with the bane of every honest comic dealers existence, the dreaded Philadelphia City Tax! Great show Derek! And yes there was that old guy walking around with a box of vintage comics to sell as usual. Sales were strong across the board, making this a show to watch.

Next up, near the end of the month, was the Big Apple Comic-Con, located at the Penn Plaza Pavilion at 7th Avenue and 33rd Street in the heart of New York City. This show is run by Mike Carbonaro, who I like to refer to as "The Promoter's Promoter." Mike proved once again that nothing so insignificant as the biggest blizzard in years was going to stop his comic show from proceeding as planned. Even though attendance was somewhat hurt by the storm, sales at this show were excellent, as they almost always are. My sales at this show were no doubt helped by the fact that we had just picked up an incredible collection of Golden and Silver Age DC, containing deep runs of many major titles.

All in all I have to say that between mail order sales and convention sales we are way ahead of last year at this point, and last year was a very good year.

And so it is with a mixture of hope and optimism for the vintage comic book market, and sadness at losing *Comic Book Marketplace*, that I say "Adios, Amigos."

Greg Pharis
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This started out as a regular market report. I was going to tell you about the latest trends (at least in my shop). I also was going to tell you how nearly all Silver Age Marvels and DCs keep increasing in popularity and sales.

But, then I realized that this report is for the last issue of *CBM*. This is my last chance to say, well, anything.

I want to say I am going to miss everything about this magazine. I was lucky enough to be a contributor at times. I always read and enjoyed each issue. But, most of all, I will miss the people who were associated with *CBM*. Through this magazine I was able to meet and learn from some of the most creative and knowledgeable people in comics fandom.

However, there was one thread that weaved through them all—*their incessant love* for comic books. I want to give special recognition to Gary Carter and Mike Naiman, who always went the extra yard and made things a little more special than they already were. I believe there is still a need for this kind of magazine. I'm really sad to see it end.

To all the readers and collectors of comic books, I say keep reading, keep learning, and hang on to the history (after all it is uniquely ours). See you in the funny papers!

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It is with a sad note that I turn in this final Market Report for *CBM*. But I praise the fact that it had a long run of 121 issues, making it one of the great mags in Comics Collecting History. I hear *CBM* will combine and come back in a new format, I send best wishes on the new venture!

We had an unusual lull around Christmas time, but by the end of January we were booming again. Anything and everything was selling again. Strangely, since we now sell only via mail order, we find that *X-Men* (1980 up) and *Wolverine* are usually among our all-time slowest sellers. This is probably because almost every city has a store with a good stock of these titles. Strange as it seems, *Woody Woodpecker* outsells both titles by at least 2 to 1.

Think you know your Golden Age? It is amazing the lack of knowledge on vintage 1942-1946 Canadian comics. They are still in big demand, but near impossible to find. A truly great find of original Canadian comic art was made, obtained direct from GA artist Fred Kelly. Fred personally rescued these pages from destruction by the publisher way back in WW2 and has kept them stored since. They were purchased by a collector I often talk to. This is the largest single collection of Bell Features original art outside of the National Library Bell Archives in Ottawa, with 20 splash pages including: *Nelvana*, *Speed Savage*, *Steve Storms*, *Betty Burd*, *Capt Red Thortan*, *Cinder Smith*, *The Brain*, *Tang*, *Major Domo and Jo Jo*, *Invisible Commando*, *Ace Bradley*, *Rex Baxter Counterspy*, *Clip Curtis the Dreamer* and *Nels Grant Private Eye*. *Nelvana* and *Johnny Canuck* are currently the most requested of GA Canadian comics, selling faster than we can find them in *any* condition.

I came across and sold a scarce collection of Canadian color vintage hybrid title variant editions, published by Bell Features, most with Atlas/Marvel contents, all titles that do *not* exist for USA editions. I have listed contents and prices realized, to make fandom aware these little gems exist.

Sales: *Boots & Saddle* #28 (1950; Kid Colt on Horse with 3 Indians-c; Tumlinson cover art; 3xKid Colt-s; Growler Joe-s) G/VG $24, #30 (Black Rider-c by Maneely; 4xBlack Rider-s; Rattler Crool-s) *rare* G/VG $24, #31 (Kid Colt-c; 5xKid Colt-s) VG $29, #32 (Gunfight in Saloon-c; Contents: "Kansas Massacre of 1864" Danny Brett "true" Civil war-s, "Two-Gun Showdown at Black Rock" with Hawk Gaither & Frank Cawley, "He Tried to Starve a Thousand Men" with California Byrnes, "Gun Duel in Powder Valley" with Black Jack Cronin "true" west story) *rare* FN $39, #33 (Maneely-c/a; 3xRed Larabee Gunhawks; Cash Devilin-s) *rare* FN $39; *Bronco Busters* #7 (Gunhawk-c by Maneely; 3xManeely-a; 3xRed Larabee Gunhawks-s; Outlaws Code-s) VG $29; *Corral Comics* #17 (Kid Colt-c/s) FN

$39; *Cowboy Trails* #32 (3xTexas Kid-s; Maneely-a; "Violence"-s, with Tuska-a) VG $29, #34 (Clem Tooley-c; Black Rider-s; Apache Kid-s; Fighting Texan-s; Red Larabee Gunhawk-s) G $19; *Cowboy 'Ventures* #35 (Black Rider-c/s; Prarie Kid-s; 2 pg Hard Luck Kid text-s; Red Hawkins-s) G/VG $24; *Frontier Marshal* #8 (3xBlack Rider-s; "Torture"-s with Tuska-a) VG/FN $34; *Jetman* #28 (Space Squadron-c; 3xCaptain Jet Dixon & Space Squadron-s; Blast Revere-s) covers creased, thus G- $35; *Jubilee Comics* #14 (GGA Nellie the Nurse cover; Howie Post-c/a; 3xNellie the Nurse-s; 4 pgs of Mr Nexdoor; 2 pgs Trixie Treet) VG/FN $29; *Ranger Trails* #16 (Atlas/Marvel western material; Photo-c; I was a Honky Tonk Queen-s; Cowpoke who Jilted My Heart-c/s) VG+ $39, #21 (Atlas/Marvel western material; 3xRed Larabee Gunhawk-s; Photo-c) G $19, #22 (Atlas/Marvel western material; Black Rider-c/s) VG $29; *Rodeo* #13 (1950; Photo-c; Black Rider-s; Hartley-a; Apache Kid-s; Dead Man's Gold-s; Whipping Panel; Red Larabee Gunhawk-s; Maneely-a) VG $29; *Slam-Bang Comics* #11(Atlas/Marvel western material; Indian Knife Fight-c; 3xRed Warrior-s) FN $39; *Terrific Comics* #13 (Atlas/Marvel western material; 3xRed Larabee Gunhawk-s; Gunhawk-c) FN $39; *Tribal Warrior* #45 (Red Warrior Indian-c; 3xRed Warrior-s; Feud in the Forest-s; Tom Gill-a; Word "Tribal" is pasted over the word "Indian" in the title on the cover—this was done by Publisher) FN $39; *Western Cowboys & Outlaws* #37 (Kid Colt-c; Whip, Gunfight in street & wanted poster-c; 3xKid Colt-s; Growler Joe-s) FA/G $15.

And finally we still have in stock Movie Western (featuring LASH LARUE) (Bell Features Pub; Canadian hybrid variant edition; title does *not* exist in USA editions) #8 (1950/51; 36 pages including covers; Lash Larue Photo cover; interior has contents of *Lash Larue* #8, contained within these Bell Features Canadian covers; Heroin drug story) FN US $69.

Fanzines, magazines and related items have been selling well. There are just so many items that are not well known. If there was a good guide that listed what exists and the contents, many of these items would be in much bigger demand. I have left in the contents descriptions, as that is often what makes them interesting.

Here are a few sample **interesting items** (*none* listed in Overstreet): *Art of Frank Thorne featuring Red Sonja* (Cartoonews Pub; stiff covers fanzine/magazine; 66 pages; profile on the artist with photos, art and history; 1978; *scarce*) FN $20; *Back for More* (1978; Bernie Wrightson; trade paperback/graphic novel fanzine, 7/1978; softcover) FN $39; *Castle of Frankenstein* #9 (11/1966; Cesar Romero as Joker photo-c; Batman, Karloff) FN/VF $25, #11 (Nimoy as Spock photo-c; *Star Trek*, *Dr Faustus*; Men behind Marvel comics; Talk with Christopher Lee) FN/VF $29, #12 (Spock speaks; Stan Lee interview; Frank Brunner-a; ABC-TV's *Spider-Man*; Christopher Lee interview; *Planet of the Apes*) FN/VF $29, #15 (*Beneath the Planet of the Apes*; Christopher Lee as Dracula; Frank Brunner-a) VF $25, #16 (1971; Satanism & Vampires issue; Ken Kelly painted-c; Barnabas Collins-c; Robert Bloch; "A case of Conscience" 10 pages of comics, with early art by Bernie Wrightson) VF $25, #17 (Magic & Occult issue; painted-c by Frank Brunner; *Mephisto Waltz*, Dracula, Harryhausen; *THX-1138*; Robert Bloch) VF $25, #18 (1972; Frankenstein painted-c, by Ken Kelly; *Night of the Living Dead*; Robert Bloch; Karloff's last movie; El Topo; John Carradine interview; H.P. Lovecraft on film; Tarzan; Wally Wood, Roy Krenkel, Jim Steranko, Neal Adams, Ken Barr; *Tales from the Crypt* EC film) VF $22; *Cisco Kid* #1 (Street Enterprises; B&W comics mag; reprints the 1951 newspaper strips by Jose Luis Salinas & Rod Reed; *scarce*; 3/1973) FN $12; *Colour Your Dreams* (Capitol City Comix, 1972; B&W fanzine; 32 pages; 8-1/2"x11"; stiff paper stock; Jeff Jones-c; includes Jeff Jones, Henry Pitz, Howard Chaykin, Howard Pyle, Bernie Wrightson, J. Allen St. John, Barry Windsor Smith, Michael Kaluta, Arthur Rackham, Maxfield Parrish, Cockrum, Simonson, Krenkel, etc.; 1972) FN $25; *Cosmic Sorcery* #1 (1977; B&W adult comics magazine; nudity; Chien Pub; with 1 page each art by Neal Adams, Buckler, Chaykin, Jeff Jones, Gil Kane, R. Kline, George Perez, etc; Buckler-c; *rare*) FN $20; *Fabulous Fantastic Four* (1979; Montreal, Canada; EH-Les Editions Heritage, English language color graphic novel; Kirby and Buscema-a; 52 pages; stiff covers; ISBN #0-7773-0252-7; *scarce*) FN $18; *Fantastic Four Meet the Witch* (Whitman Pub coloring book #1030; new material published *only* in this edition; *rare*; 1977) FN $18; *Frankenstein* Marvel illustrated graphic novel (Marvel Pub; large trade paperback; cover & art by Bernie Wrightson; introduction by Stephen King; 1983; 196 pages including covers; *scarce*; low print run; text with over 40 full page illustrations by Wrightson; a Wrightson masterpiece) VF $60; Howard the Duck for President Pin-Up/Print, by Bernie Wrightson (1976; Marvel Pub; sepia print brown & white color; *scarce*) FN $18; *Incredible Hulk* (1978; Montreal, Canada; EH-Les Editions Heritage, English language color graphic novel; *rare*; Kirby & Trimpe-a; 52 pages; stiff covers; ISSN #0701-9114; contains *Hulk* #180/181 = 1st App Wolverine storyline) VG $12; *The Journal of Frankenstein* (New World Ent Pub; Calvin C. Beck Editor; early movie monsters film magazine; predecessor *Castle of Frankenstein*; early famous monsters imitator; Volume-1 #1 1959; Boris Karloff; Vincent Price; Zacherley; *7th Voyage of Sinbad*) FN/VF $75; *Jungle Jim* #1 (Street Enterprises; B&W comics mag; reprints 1935 newspaper strips by Alex Raymond 1972; *scarce*) VG $12; *George Herriman's Krazy Kat* #1 (Street Enterprises; B&W comics mag; reprints 1933 newspaper strips; 3/1973; *scarce*) FN $12; *Manhunter, The Complete Saga* (1979; Walt Simonson classic; early trade paperback/graphic novel; seven episodes of an early Simonson backup feature from *Detective* #437-443, including the final 20-page team-up with Batman; presented in b&w from original art, with Goodwin introduction illustrated with

character designs by Walt. New color Simonson cover; *rare*) VF $39; *Mighty Marvel Comic Convention* #1 (magazine/fanzine; 1975; Spider-Man cover; Hulk back-c; Olshevsky; Conan comics; Spider-Man newspaper strip; Dracula; Marvel Bullpen; the First MarVel-Con, held at Hotel Commodore) VG $20; *Miss Fury*, by Tarpe Mills; (3/1979; painted-c; intro by Tom Fagan; classic Good Girl Art reprints; trade paperback/graphic novel fanzine; 68 pages; stiff covers) VG $18; *101 Outer Space Jokes* (1979 mass market paperback; *rare* Will Eisner art item) GD $12; *Screen Thrills Illustrated* V1 #1 (Warren Pub; 1962-1965; B&W film magazine; Sam Sherman & Forrest J Ackerman editors; action, serials, comedy, adventure, super-heroes, mystery and western films; 6/1962; Basil Gogos painted-c; scarcer issue; Tarzan, 3 Stooges, Superman, Dick Tracy) VF $50; *Spacehawk by Wolverton* (Archival Press; trade paperback/graphic novel fanzine; 68 pages; stiff covers; intro by Ron Goulart; 1978) VG $15; *Spider-Man* (1981; Ideals Pub; color graphic novel) VG $10; *Star Fems* #1 (Paragon Pub; great GGA; b&w comics in magazine format; 1980; Fujitake-c; Chaykin/Terry Austin back-c; art by: Terry Austin, Bill Black, Chaykin, Fujitake, Hempel; includes: Stormy Tempest, Mysta of the Moon, Syren, etc.) FN $20, #2 (1982; Gulacy-c; art by: Beatty, Bill Black, Broderick, Fujitake, Ordway, etc) FN $12; *Sunpot Planet Schematic by Vaughn Bode* (1971/72; the space adventures of Dr. Electric and the sexpot, Belinda Bump; New York: Stellar Productions; 1st Edition thus, with material & blueprint; science fiction/fantasy comics; 28-page booklet with black-and-white comic art; with blueprint map poster) FN $35.

Some trends emerging include these titles getting hotter: *Conan the Barbarian*, *DC Comics Presents* #26 (1st app New Teen Titans; Perez-a), *New Teen Titans* #2 (1st Deathstroke; Perez-a), *NYX* #3 (Wolverine's Daughter?), *Rampaging Hulk* (1970s Marvel B&W magazine; stories set in early 1960s Marvel history; includes: Starlin, Man-Thing, original Avengers and X-Men), *Red Circle Sorcery* (Archie Pub; great 1970s horror comic, with art by Morrow, Toth, Wrightson), *Red Sonja Comics*, all *Savage Sword of Conan* (but especially the scarce #200-235; with #235 destined to be as scarce and valuable as *G.I. Joe* #155), *Smurfs Treasury* (Marvel; *scarce*)

High-grade 1970-1984 comic magazines are hard to come by. With only a few exceptions, only zero to ten copies each are graded in 9.4 or better on the CGC Census. Warren mags and 1970s Marvel b&w mags are biggest in demand by investors. We managed to locate a large collection of these mags in high grade and most sold much faster than I imagined and at good multiples.

Some hard to find items that are listed in *Overstreet* and worth seeking out include: *Doc Savage* (Comics Digest) (*rare*; Skylark Pub; 1979) and *Twilight Zone* (Comics Digest) (*rare*; Skylark Pub); *Fiction Illustrated* (Pyramid/Byron Preiss Pub; the trade paperback/graphic novel versions) #3 ("Chandler" by Jim Steranko; 1976) and #4 ("Son of Sherlock Holmes" by Ralph Reese; 1976); *Quadrant* #1 (Quadrant Pub; B&W oversize comic; 1983; Nudity; Peter HSU art).

All late Silver Age and all Bronze Age horror titles by all companies are still *hot*. Warren mags are not nearly as common as they used to be. Demand is so big recently, that all dealer stocks everywhere are drying up. It is becoming apparent that many issues are in much lower supply than others. These are some Warren issue numbers I had difficulty keeping in stock (although we still have small quantities of most): *Creepy* #11, 19, 24, 29, 32, 34, 46, 50, 53-55, 63, 68, 70, 74, 76, 78-80, 97, 137, 141, 146; *Eerie* #8, 17, 23, 25, 39, 45, 48, 67, 78, 81, 125, 128, 133, 135; *Vampirella* #1, 3, 4, 7, 9, 11, 16, 19, 29, 36, 45, 52, 64, 78, 89, 100-113. I will watch these numbers to see if they stay elusive.

DC horror is still very strong. In the first few months, Charlton horror continues to garner demand. These should be watched closely. Charlton horror can be tough even in VF, much less in VF/NM or better. Thus I have seen more and more collectors building high grade sets in VF or better. Let us not forget, there are still more *readers* of these horror comics wanting low grade (as compared to investors wanting high grade), and they continue to fill in gaps in their collections as funds permit.

Over the years I have run across several collections of Silver Age Marvels with their ad pages torn out. This was no accident; some fans did not like these ad pages in the way of the story/comic pages. I recall in 1982 selling his usual weekly new comic shipment to a collector. On Monday he came back to my store for 2000 new comic bags. The fellow explained that he had worked hard the entire weekend, ripping out the ad pages out of every single book in his near complete Silver Age Marvel collection. He further explained that while he was doing this, he wanted to put "fresh" new bags on these comics. I bring this up, as I just got in a collection of 100+ early Marvel #1-20s all with ad pages torn out. Most were in low grade anyways. The surprising part is that we sold over 50% of them at about 50% of *Guide* in condition. It seems that as long as the story is complete, there are readers that love "cheap" copies of the originals. I suspect some might have low grade or coverless copies that they might use to complete a few of them.

From the early 1960s through early 1980s Marvel printed UK British pence cover Price variants on about 50-75% of their popular super-hero titles. These were all printed in USA and originally only for sale in UK. If they were not printed in USA they would still be interesting, but being a USA publication makes them true variant editions. This includes *Amazing Spider-Man* back as far as #1 and as high as #120. This includes 1960s *Daredevil* as high as #170. They still circulate in UK but are probably 10-50 times scarcer than regular US editions. The expensive key issues tend to fetch a bit under *Guide*.

But we have had success selling the cheaper issues (on popular titles) at a slight premium over *Guide*. Especially popular in the USA are issues with

"Marvel All-Colour Comics" banner at top of cover. I have seen some dealers and collectors think they are ultra rare variant and ask absurd premiums. So for all those variant collectors currently gathering up the Canadian cover price variant editions of the early to mid 1980s, you now have another cool variant challenge to collect.

Most late Bronze Age 1975 and through to 1985 Marvel and DC (Secret Wars & Crisis era) remain undervalued. This is the time to *buy* these items. Remember you read it here. They are now 20-30 years old and will *not* remain cheap forever. It was only a decade back when NM copies of *Marvel Spotlight* #5 were only about $10. In 1995 would you have believed it if someone told you that $500 is a wholesale price for a *strict* NM copy? 1981-1985 are just *not* as common as many think in strict 9.4 NM condition. It will not take long for these books to disappear if demand increases.

We are finally getting around to sorting out our old posters (we have about 14,000 in stock). We have about 5000 one-sheet movie posters, about 4000 video-store movie posters, about 3000 chain store posters (music, characters, TV, humor, girls, cars, etc) and about 1000 assorted. In addition, we have a big selection of comic related posters. Most of our pre-1980 comic posters have sold. The rare Third Eye Pub, blacklight, velvet and other scarce Marvel and DC posters have brought good prices for a few years now, some commanding $75-$300 each. But we still have a selection of the 1970s comic art posters that were once the rage (Wrightson, Jeff Jones, Frazetta, Tolkein, etc), most now bring from $15-$50 each. From the 1980s and 1990s we have a great selection of the many posters that Marvel and DC sold in plastic tubes, typically in large boxes with display cards. This included many great artists (Byrne, Perez, etc) and characters (Spider-Man, X-Men, Batman, etc). There are probably over 50 posters with Spider-Man alone, try to find even half of them. Most of these older posters are already getting scarce and usually bring $5-15 each. And we have a great selection of promo posters, the type given to store owners to put on their wall or in the window to sell product. Also, some were made in bigger quantities as handouts for weekly new comic customers. Most were disposed of by both dealers and collectors alike. Many are already quite scarce. The less popular characters, especially by independent publishers, usually sell in the $3-$6 price range. The popular character and artist promo posters bring $5-$20 each depending on scarcity. These promo posters are poised to be a real collectible of the future.

Update on DC Comics/Whitman Variant Editions: Here is the most up-to-date version of issues confirmed to exist (research by Byron Glass and Doug Sulipa): *Action Comics* #481-483, 485-492, 495-499, 501, 502, 504, 505, 507, 508; *All-New* Collectors Edition #C-56; *Batman* #306-308, 311-320, 323, 324, 326; *Brave and the Bold* #145-147, 150-159, 165; *DC Comics Presents* #1-4, 9-12, 14, 16, 19, 21, 22; *Famous First Edition* #C-61; *Flash* #268, 273-276, 278, 283, 286; *Green Lantern* #116-119, 121; *Justice League of America* #158, 160-162, 166, 168, 169, 171-173, 176-179, 181; *Legion of Super-Heroes* #261, 263, 264, 266; *New Adventures of Superboy* #1, 2, 5, 6, 8; *Sgt Rock* #329; *Superboy* #244-248, 251-258; *Super Friends* #14-16, 20-23, 25, 32; *Superman* #321-323, 325-327, 329-332, 335-345, 348, 350; *Warlord* #22; *Wonder Woman* #250-252, 255-264.

Always remember: (1) Collect what you like; (2) Buy for the love of the hobby first and leave investment as potential bonus dividend; (3) If you do invest, be sure you know *strict* condition grading down cold; (4) Do not buy items as the peak in the market; (5) Buy several types of things at current low prices and wait for future trends to arrive; sell at premiums when they peak. (6) Do not follow everyone else. (7) Above all—have *FUN* and keep collecting!

Opinions expressed in CBM *"Market Reports" are solely those of the individual dealers and collectors who contribute them. Prices vary by location,*

Nolan's Notebook

[continued from page 15]

Showgirls ran three (#4, 1-2) in Marvel's 1956-57 period. Millie the Model had a lot more fans, but Sherry and her friends were just as much fun.

Patty Powers—This series lasted only four issues (#4-7) in 1955-56, but it will take you forever to find all four. Another series Stan Lee and Al Hartley produced in bravura style reflective of the glamour girls of the era.

Nature Boy—In 1956-57, Charlton produced three issues of this odd super hero (#3-5). The stories were awful but just the concept makes this character collectible, along with colorful covers. I bought #5 off the newsstands and didn't know what to make of it!

Space Western—This one is for Scott Shaw! Charlton's six issues in 1952-53 (#40-45) definitely rank among the oddest comic book concepts of all time. You probably won't be able to find all six, but you need only one to realize that Spurs Jackson and his Space Vigilantes was the type of concept that defined "comic book" for all too many people in the 1950s.

Fight Comics and both Senorita Rio and Tiger Girl—The stories in the issues with both (#32-71 except #69) can't always be called logical, but the energetic art and great covers make these collectible.

Sheena, Queen of the Jungle—The original jungle girl, Sheena appeared in 18 issues of her own title and on most of the covers of Jumbo. What's fun is to take any ten Sheena covers and ask ten collectors to rate them 1-to-10 from best to worst. Bet you will get close to ten different answers!

Firehair—The Queen of the Sagebrush Frontier appeared in 11 issues of her own title and in *Rangers* #21-65. These are rousing stories, among the best from Fiction House. But as with Sheena, try getting any ten collectors to agree on the covers they like best.

Ghost Comics—This ran only 11 issue (1951-54) during the heyday of horror comics, with routine Ghost Gallery reprints from *Jumbo* inside. But, oh, those ghastly, ghostly, garish Maurice Whitman covers! One of my fondest childhood memories is finding the particularly exotic #2 at a second-hand bookstore and deliberately watch-

ing the shocked features of people who saw me holding it up on the bus ride home!

Planet #46—this 1947 issue is that rarity of rarities, a male bondage cover with an Amazon super woman of sorts swinging from a spaceship to rescue the befuddled boy. One of my favorite Golden Age covers.

Green Hornet—The later issues of Harvey's adaptation of Fran Striker's radio character are especially fun, though the entire run is worth looking at. Contrary to the name of this comic, this was an anthology title with a wide variety of features during its 47-issue run in the 1940s.

Little Dot—One of the most charming titles of the 1950s featured some of the best surreal sight-gag covers of all time. Just about any issue of Harvey's Little Dot, an original character, epitomizes sheer fun and childhood innocence.

Invisible Scarlet O'Neil—she appeared in three issues of her own Harvey title (1950-51), plus Tales of the Invisible in *Harvey Hits* #59 (1952), after appearing much earlier in Eastern's *Famous Funnies*. This newspaper strip never achieved the success it deserved in comic books. I can't help but think she was an inspiration for Marvel's Invisible Girl in the first Fantastic Four.

Boy Comics—Lev Gleason published many of the best crime stories of the 1940s, and the Crimebuster Illustories by Charles Biro were always first rate, especially those in the 1945-51 period. *Boy* and *Daredevil* are among the most under-rated titles of all.

Daredevil Comics—What a great character! The emphasis was on humanity, not heroics, with this most believable of costume heroes. The Little Wise Guys, the best of the kid groups, and Daredevil were especially good in the post-war period until the Wise Guys took over the book entirely with #70 in 1951 (except for DD's brief comeback in #79-80).

Silver Streak no number issue—In addition to reprinting Jack Cole's fascinating early Silver Streak stories, this issue, circa 1945, features one of the silliest super hero covers of all time, drawn by Dick Briefer, perhaps as a parody of Schomburg. Silver Streak is shown rescuing a woman who is being stretched on a "torture meter" labeled "worry, mild pain, shooting pains, severe headache, unbearable agony, near death and death."

Crime Does Not Pay #22—This 1942 debut issue is not only the first and most iconic of crime comics, but also features the only appearance (not counting reprints) of the War Eagle, a nifty patriotic hero. How and why the War Eagle appeared in this crime comic will forever remain one of the best mysteries of the Golden Age.

The Eagle, U.S. Jones and V...Comics—These three short-run Fox titles from 1941-42 are among the scarcest and most colorful of all patriotic hero titles. If you can get one of each, consider yourself lucky. *The Eagle* ran four issues, but the other two titles lasted only two apiece. These appeared at the end of Victor Fox's first try at publishing, long before he switched to post-war sleaze.

Our Flag Comics—At least one issue of this five-issue run from Ace (1941-42) is a must for any patriotic hero collector. The Flag's 16-page origin story in #2 makes that issue one of my favorite Golden Age issues.

The Amazing Willie Mays—this 1954 one-shot from Eastern (the *Famous Funnies* folks) is a terrific sports story. But then, I'm only slightly biased—the "Say Hey Kid" was my favorite player in the 1950s and '60s. I still say there has never been a better all-around ballplayer.

Lady Fair Play—Before Wonder Woman, before Mary Marvel, before Miss America, there was Lady Fair Play, appearing in all three issues of *Bang-Up Comics* (1941-42). Great name, great concept, great fun.

Black Cobra—The 1940s character in *Captain Flight Comics* wasn't much, but the three-issue revival under the Ajax imprint in 1954-55 was the epitome of a Cold War "commie cruncher." One of the wildest of all title transitions: from Billy Bunny to Black Cobra.

Tomboy in *Captain Flash*—the four-issue run from tiny Sterling Comics (1954-55) features solid post-Golden Age original heroics from Captain Flash, but the real charm is the teen heroine Tomboy. Definitely one of the best names ever given a costumed character.

Challenge of the Unknown #6—One of Ace's early horror efforts, this slick 1950 one-shot was the first horror comic I ever found on the back-issue stacks, circa 1957. Stories didn't come much cooler than "Villa of the Vampire" and "High Priestess of the Snake People."

Dick Cole #1-10—I believe stories in this title in the final days of Novelty Press (1949-50) were reprints from *Blue Bolt*. Sports hero Dick Cole was a nicely written and drawn knockoff of Frank Merriwell, Street & Smith's original dime novel hero of the 1896-1916 era.

Durango Kid—My favorite of the many western heroes from Magazine Enterprises, which did westerns better than anyone. The character originated in Charles Starrett's many shoot-em-ups for Monogram, a Poverty Row studio.

Extra!—Five wonderfully readable issues of gritty newspaper stories from EC in 1955 during the doomed "New Trend" period.

Phantom Feature Books #39, 53, 56 and 57 from David McKay—Anything with the Ghost Who Walks in nifty, including these late 1940s efforts.

G.I. Jane—The obscure Master/Merit folks produced a truly funny 11-issue gem from 1953-55. Just about the only comic book of its kind.

How Boys and Girls Can Help Win the War and *Remember Pearl Harbor*—These two World War II one-shots belong in the library of anyone who loves patriotic Americana. These are marvelous period pieces.

Jet Powers—Four issues from 1950-51 with some of Bob Powell, Al Williamson and George Evan's most colorful work. One of the few original space heroes of the period.

Skyman—Four essentially one-shot issues from Columbia, the folks who ran this hero during the 1940s in *Big Shot Comics*. Ogden Whitney always did good work on these long before he did all those romance and science fiction comics in the 1950s and '60s.

Swat Malone—Definitely the silliest of all sports heroes, but this 1955 one-shot is loads of fun nonetheless.

by Michelle Nolan

This Month it's 1944

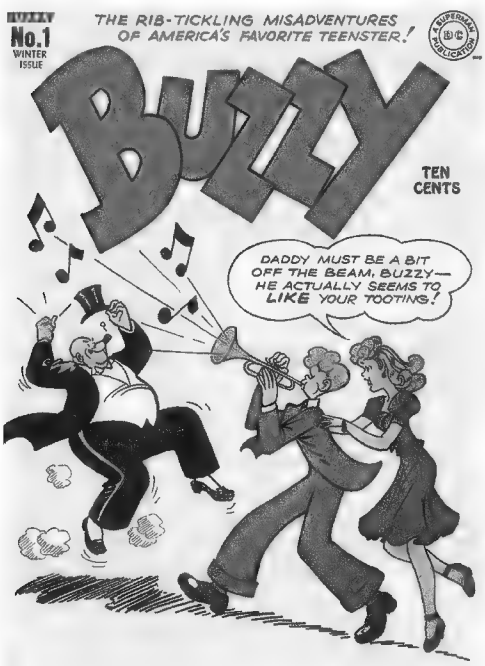
In what year did less happen in the world of comic books than any other during the Golden Age? The answer is easy—1944. Yet it was still a wonderful year, if only because the vast majority of mainline Golden Age characters created in the 1938-42 period were still going strong.

In 1944, best known from a historical perspective for the success of D-Day in June and the onslaught of the Allies as World War II neared its end, comic books continued to thrive. Even paper shortages had relatively marginal effects on the industry.

With many important editors, writers and artists serving in the military, however, creativity was definitely in short supply. In essence, comic books fought a holding action on the newsstands. Big changes were to come in the decade following the end of the war in 1945, but comic book readers were offered only few hints of these in 1944.

In retrospect, it wasn't really surprising to see most 10-cent comic books drop from their original format of 68 pages (including covers) in 1943 to 60, 52 and even 36 pages in some cases in 1944. Whether caused by a shortage of paper or a desire for greater profits, comics began the slow but steady changes that 30 years later resulted in 36-page comics for 25 cents.

(By the way, think about how long that took—40 years to evolve from 68 pages for a dime in 1934 to 36 pages for a quarter in 1974. Then consider what happened in the past 30 years. The mind boggles!)

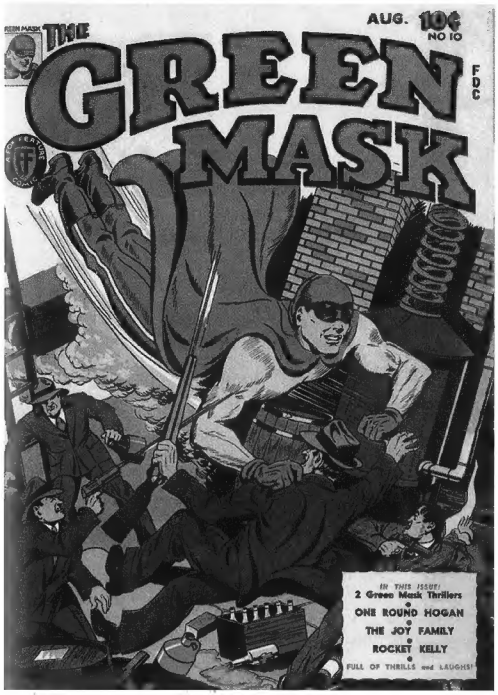


Yet the total number of newsstand issues in 1944—1,123 give or take a couple that may not exist—was still a record, surpassing the 1,051 issues of 1943. The total page count surely was lower, but not enough to make a huge impact. Even though the only new costume heroes created in 1944 were second-banana types, not many primary characters disappeared, either.

The best work to appear in 1944? The Carl Barks Duck stories. Although Barks began working fulltime as a comic book illustrator in 1943, his first full year of Donald Duck stories in *Walt Disney's Comics & Stories* was 1944—#40-51. Donald and his nephews began evolving into the characters that were to become so superlative for the rest of Barks' fabulous career.

One of my favorite 1944 comic books is *Miss America* #1. Miss America as Timely's answer to the growing popularity of Wonder Woman in *Sensation Comics* and Mary Marvel in *Wow Comics*. When Patsy Walker made her debut in *Miss America* #2, the title was on the way to big changes, although Miss America appeared in three stories in #2 and continued to appear through #5, along with her run of more than four years as a backup in *Marvel Mystery Comics*.

The most insignificant character to vanish in 1944 was DC's Dr. Fate, who last appeared in *More Fun* #98 (Jul-Aug)



and *All Star* #21 (Summer) and failed to last even a full five years, unlike most DC's creations. The Crimson Avenger, one of DC's first characters but never important, ended a six-year run in *Detective* #89 (Jul), though he lasted in *Leading* to #14 (Spring 1945), which featured the final adventure of the Seven Soldiers of Victory.

Patriotic heroes also began a slow slide in 1944 with the last appearances of Minuteman in *Master* #49 (Apr), American Crusader in *Thrilling* #41 (Apr) and Uncle Sam in *National* #45 (Dec), along with a few lesser red-white-and-blue folks. MLJ, which saw its comic book and pulp lines affected by paper shortages, discontinued *Shield-Wizard* with #13 (Spring), *Top-Notch* with #45 (Jun) and *Zip* with #47 (Summer). *Top-Notch* evolved into *Top-Notch Laugh* for three issues and then into *Suzy*.

Dozens of short-lived titles popped up in 1944, since the number of publishers hit a record. Dan Stevenson's issue-by-issue database shows that 17 publishers produced at least two-dozen issues, led by DC's 139, Dell's 109 and the increasingly influential Timely's 103. But it was significant that 26 other publishers contributed one to 18 issues.

Yet the only really commercially successful titles introduced in 1944 were DC's first full-content teen-humor comic, *Buzzy*, and the company's first attempt at anthropomorphic characters, *Funny Stuff*, along with MLJ's solid-string teen zany *Wilbur*, which ran 87 issues through 1959 without interruption. Other than *Mutt & Jeff*, DC's first humor comic was *All-Funny* #1 (Winter 1943-44), but that title featured human characters and lasted less than five years.

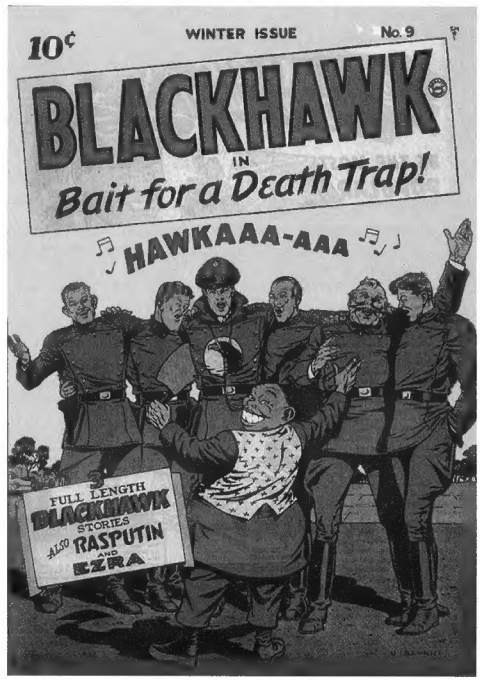
When Quality Comics discontinued *Uncle Sam* with #8 (Fall 1943), *Blackhawk* #9 (Winter 1944) replaced it. Yet *Blackhawk* #10 did not appear until Spring 1946. It was a typical pattern for Quality Comics, which continued a 60-page format on many of its comics into 1947, yet only with anthology titles. Quality had the same break between *Dollman* #7 (Fall 1943) and #8 (Spring 1946).

In 1944, three publishers which had produced both comics and pulps—Marvel, Columbia (MLJ) and Ace—elected to focus primarily on comics. Three other publishers—Thrilling/Better (Nedor), Fiction House and Street & Smith—continued to produce both types of 10-cent entertainment.

Timely's Patsy Walker was the most commercially successful character introduced in 1944. But who was the most important? For my money, it was Mr. Mxyztplk, Superman's long-running other-dimensional nemesis, later spelled Mxyzptlk. As noted in the *Overstreet Price Guide*, the imp debuted March 7 in the newspaper strip and in *Superman* #30 (Sep-Oct) in the comic books.

Also noteworthy: Nedor's Grim Reaper debuted in *Fighting Yank* #7 (Feb) and ran in 17 issues of *Wonder Comics* beginning with #1 (May). Fawcett's Radar, the International Policeman, who wasn't really a costumed hero, debuted in *Captain Marvel* #35 (May) and *Master* #50 (May). Fiction House came up with a potted-palm winner in Tiger Girl, who debuted in *Fight* #32 (Jan) and lasted a full decade, shifting to *Jungle Comics* for the final two years.

Victor Fox, the infamous pioneering publisher who had gone out of business with issues dated early 1942, returned to comics in 1944 by snatching *Blue Beetle* back from Holyoke with #31 (Jun). He then revived *Green Mask* with #10 (Aug) and published a variety of one-shot giants in 1944.



Steven Bates

I Think I Can Manage

I Think I Can Manage *is a weekly column by retailer Steven Bates, who runs Bookery Fantasy, a million dollar retail operation in Fairborn, Ohio. Here, Bates looks at the recent acquisition of an auction house and retail operation by Diamond owner Steve Geppi, and finds lessons for retailers.*

Diamond Comic Distributors owner Steve Geppi has acquired Morphy Auctions, which specializes in collectible Americana (cast iron goods, mechanical banks, western memorabilia, tin toys, Disneyana, etc.), along with the auction house's retail division the Adamstown Antique Gallery. Based out of Denver, Pennsylvania, Morphy's auctions are "simulcast" on eBay, offering Geppi's Diamond International Galleries an established and highly-visible non-comics collectibles division. Retailers might question Geppi's motives, fearing the worst about the future of the comics industry; but, then, when don't comics retailers have a knee-jerk reaction to any of Diamond's practices?

I looked up the term "diversification" on www.1000ventures.com (Ten3), a very informative website offering a wide spectrum of business "coaching." Ten3 defines diversification as "improving core process execution and/or enhancing a business unit's structural position;" in other words, diversifying increases the competitive advantage of a company. This can be achieved a number of different ways, including internal projects and strategic alliances. Geppi's preferred method seems to be horizontal (and, to some extent, geographical) diversification through acquisitions and mergers; Capital City and Alliance Games Distributors come to mind. Ten3 models the advantages to this tactic thusly:

The four main reasons for making an acquisition include: 1) To acquire complementary products, in order to broaden the line; 2) To acquire new markets or distribution channels; 3) To acquire additional mass, and benefit from economies of scale; 4) To acquire technology, to complement or replace the currently used one.

Merger synergies are great as they may give companies the needed technology, people, infrastructure, global sales, marketing and distribution opportunities.

It seems obvious that Geppi is simply increasing the scope of his already impressive collectibles business, adding divisions that synergistically complement the established infra- and superstructure of Diamond. The items sold through Morphy Auctions (and Adamstown Antique Gallery) are simply historical and cultural cousins to the comic books, Big Little Books, rings, artwork, and other collectables already offered by Diamond Galleries.

First, I'd like to congratulate and thank Mr. Geppi for his acquisition. A healthier Diamond means a healthier comics industry, which translates into a healthier shop for me. Though I'm no expert, I'd guess that, generally speaking, antiques and Americana appeal to a wider and somewhat different demographic than comics, and the sale through Morphy and Adamstown should "acquire new markets" and "broaden the line" with "complementary products." Further, it may give Diamond new outlets for selling collectable comic books, putting them out in new channels to be discovered by collectors of similar material (particularly western, military, crime, and movie comics, Disneys, and, I would surmise, anything biographical or historical).

I also think retailers should look at Diamond's business model and see if it can't be applied to your own business. Many comic and gaming shops fail because a downturn in the industry or economy sinks them. Diversification provides a "buffer zone" or two against taking too big of a hit when every customer suddenly turns against Product X. Of course, the line you diversify into must be complementary to your business and appealing to your existing and potential customer base. Many shops do well with toys, action figures such as Batman, Star Wars and Transformers. These do well with many of our established customers. Would I sell as many Barbies or Cabbage Patch Dolls? Probably not, though another store might.

Sometimes diversification is part of a long-term plan; other times it's more temporary. Beanie Babies and Pogs are good examples. Many retailers used these transient fads to bolster their bottom line, catering to collectors with short attention spans and a lot of disposable income. When demand dried up, dealers moved on to "the next big thing" to increase sales and cash flow. On the flip side, investing time, energy and money into a product line and building a clientele over time can really pay off, earning you a reputation as *the* expert in your area. Does anybody in a fifty mile radius of Golden Apple even carry yo-yos? Why would they? For decades, the late Bill Liebowitz dominated that market, built by his love of the product and enthusiasm for the hobby. Could the Bookery do as well with yo-yos? No, and we actually tried. But we have successfully integrated Silver and Golden Age collectibles, modern comics, games, toys and DVDs in one business. Diversification has, over the years, allowed us to survive when sales dipped or disappeared on one or more of the other lines.

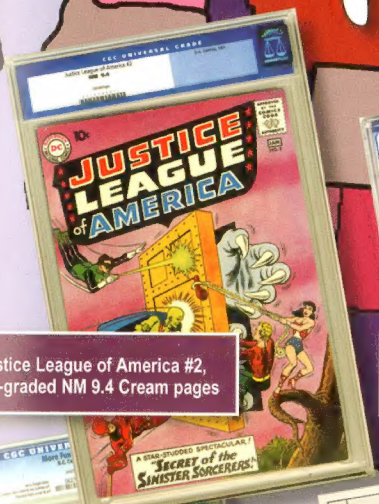
This week's news reads "Geppi Acquires Auction House." What headlines are you writing for your company? What's next for you?

[Reprinted from the online newsletter ***ICv2.com*** *with permission of Milton Griepp.]*

Road Trip!

Heritage Comics is back on the road, bringing all the excitement of our live Signature Auctions to the Big Apple, New York City, on May 18 & 19 at the New Yorker Hotel, conveniently located at 8th Avenue and 34th Street.

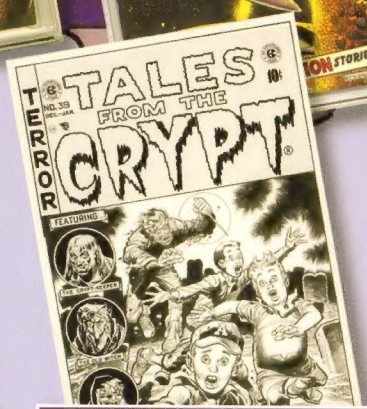
New York City
May 18 & 19



Justice League of America #2, CGC-graded NM 9.4 Cream pages

Weird Fantasy #10 Gaines File pedigree, CGC-graded NM/MT 9.8 Off-white to white pages

More Fun Comics #54 Larson pedigree, CGC-graded NM- 9.2 White pages



Jack Davis - Tales From the Crypt #39 Original Cover Art

John Byrne and Bob Layton - X-Men #113 Original Cover Art

With the second part of the Northern Lights Collection (featuring spectacular runs of *Adventure* and *More Fun*, among others) and some true rarities from the vault of legendary artist Gill Fox, this is an auction you won't want to miss!

Best of all, there's still time to consign your comics and original art to sell alongside these great pieces. Just call or write Ed Jaster (EdJ@HeritageComics.com) at 1-800-872-6467, ext. 288 or Lon Allen (LonA@HeritageComics.com) at 1-800-872-6467, ext. 261, or Grey Smith (GreySM@HeritageComics.com) for movie material at 1-800-872-6467, ext. 367 today. The earliest consignments get the most publicity, so make that call NOW!

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HOW DO 162,145* UNIQUE READERS GET THEIR COLLECTIBLES NEWS EACH MONTH?

Scoop, your free, weekly information source for entertainment and collectibles, is packed with the latest news, auction results, features, and more. Each issue we highlight the latest trends, record sales, and lots of fun stuff, too. ***Scoop*** gives you the big picture!

http://scoop.diamondgalleries.com

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